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THREE TIMES A MONTH

Adventure

Gordon Young
L. Patrick Greene
Romaine H. Lowdermilk
William Byron Mowery
Charles Victor Fischer
John Murray Reynolds
Ralph R. Perry
Wilkeson O'Connell
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Vol. LIV, No. IV Sept. 10, 1925

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**Occasionally one of our stories will be called an "Off-the-Trail" story, a warning that it is in some way different from the usual magazine stories, perhaps a little different, perhaps a good deal. It may violate a canon of literature or a custom of magazines, or merely be different from the type usually found in this magazine. The difference may lie in unusual theme, material, ending, or manner of telling. No question of relative merit is involved.*

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Three Complete Novelettes

MANY strange things had happened in the Oruna district on the Niger delta—things having to do with the fat native chief, *Masai*, with his son, *Tola*, who was a fool, and the mysterious *Red Cat*. *Niger Nettison*, who knew more about the district than any other white man, kept his head and uncovered another bit of history which never got into the official records. "MUD," a complete novelette by Robert Simpson, will be in the next issue.

WHEN the *Kid* came to the bandit's cabin in the mountains he thought he was getting away from a life of monotony. He was not mistaken. "FREEZE-OUT," a complete novelette by Walter J. Coburn, will appear in the next issue.

CHINESE pirates found the Fai Tsi Long Archipelago a secure storage-place for their rich plunder. The dark, forbidding maze of islets that grotesquely dot the yellow waters harbored one such cache—and the cutthroats who fought for it. "THE WHITE-TAILED DRAGON," a novelette by H. Bedford-Jones, appears complete in the next issue.

Other stories in the next issue are forecast on the last page of this one

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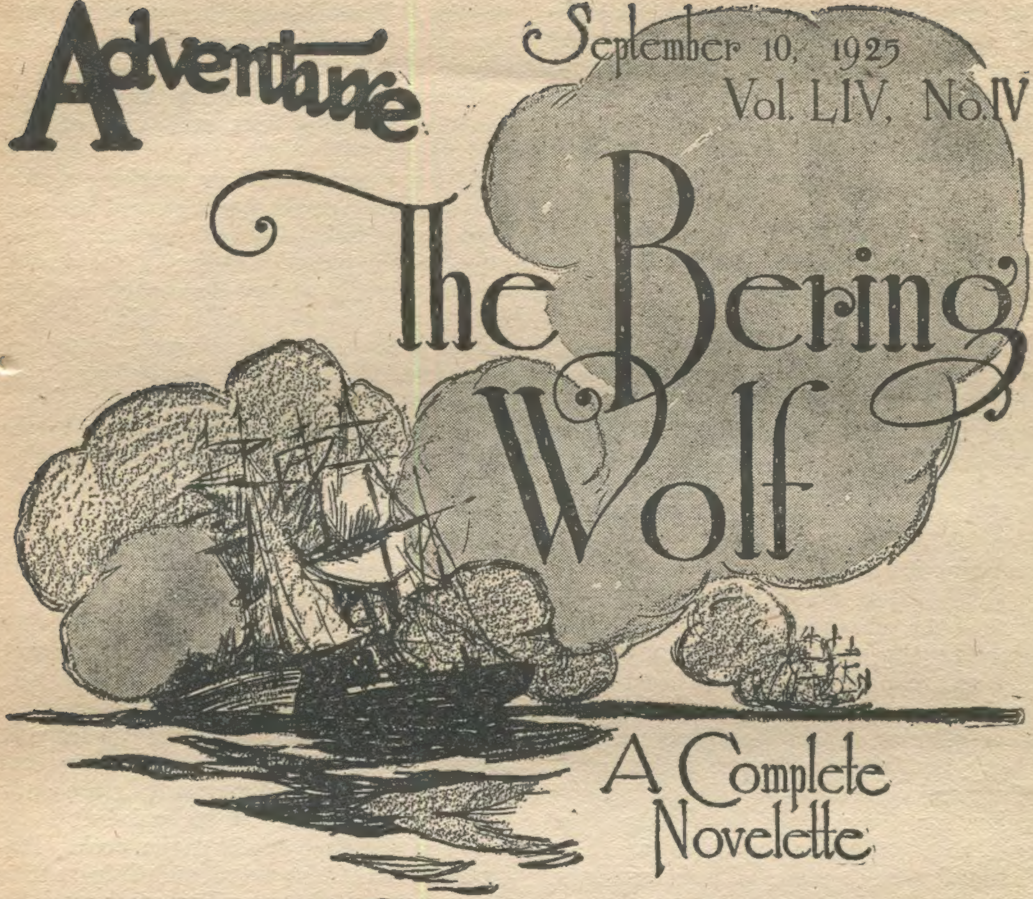

The Bering Wolf

A Complete Novelette

William Byron Mowery

Author of "Hard Lines," "The Claw Necklace," etc.

MORNING had just broken, clear and beautiful. A mild southeast breeze had blown away the frost-tang of night. The heavens were pearly-blue and the sea was afire with a mellow sunshine—the mellow, shimmering gold of an April day in the Aleutian Islands.

The *Diomede*, a little wasp of a brigantine, lay at night anchor in ten fathoms. Her sails were idly aflutter, and her deck heaved gently as the lazy waves loped past her. At the masthead streamed her small red-and-white emblem—a wolf snarling, one paw upraised.

Four versts* directly ahead a string of sharp reefs stretched across her path. Four versts on beyond the barrier the low shores of Attoonai—fair and green and peaceful Attoonai—reared out of the ocean.

Roughly, the island was shaped like the head and torso of a human. From north headland to southern cape it was a hundred versts long, and sixty wide at its widest. On both east and west sides of the neck were sheltered harbors of fair fathoms.

For three straight springs the *Diomede* had left her home port in Kamchatka and darted across the Bering Sea to the first of the "Fire-Breathing Islands," Attoo, beyond which few Russian fur-traders dared venture in those early days of their groping Eastward. For three straight springs the

---

* A verst is practically the equivalent of a kilometer.

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brigantine had pushed boldly on past Attoo and Agattoo and the Andreanof *ostrova** through uncharted, fog-dangerous seas, to the upper regions of the Aleutian Archipelago.

Three autumns straight she had homed to Petropavlovsk with a cargo of sea-otter, fur seal, precious fox and bales of smaller peltry which ran to a hundred thousand of roubles, and stirred the hot envy of sister free traders radiating out of Kamchatka.

The prows of most adventurous vessels turned south from Attoo. For to the south lay Gamaland, the mythical, fabulously rich continent which the schoolmen had placed in the Pacific between Japan and America. Gamaland had to be there, said the schoolmen, to balance Europe around the globe, else the world would turn topsy-turvy. Harbors, capes and rivers; gulfs, mountains and inland lakes, complete to the last detail, there stood Gamaland on the charts of the schoolmen; just as boldly and plainly as that broad Northwest Passage which was mapped through the heart of the American continent. Only the latitudes and longitudes of Gamaland were a little vague. Perhaps to add spice to the search.

Once and once only the *Diomede's* young captain had gone south from Attoo, had sailed through Gamaland from north to south and east to west, without seeing it. Thereafter he went east and north, and made his own charts and discovered a virgin fur territory. Now for the fourth spring, in April of 1755, the *Diomede* had returned to her discovery, and was awaiting clear weather and low tide to pass the reef barrier and gain her former anchorage in the northwestern harbor of Attoonai.

In the bows of the trim little vessel stood three men.

One of them was the Prior Ioassof, a towering priest of the St. Basilius order from the Okhotsk diocese. He had come with the *Diomede*, not for money gain or love of sea-wandering or ease of labor, but to spread the light of his faith among the island tribes. A deeply devout and pious man, but no flesh mortifier or austere monk. He could tell a rare story when his turn came, and could drink a bout handily with the Russian crew. And yet, in the evening service, they listened to him all the more earnestly because of his humanness. He had a ready skill in medicine and surgery. Prayerbook and ceremonials were scarcely more important with him than physic and lancet. A rare combination of abilities, indeed, considering that in many quarters anatomy was still one of the diabolic arts.

At Prior Ioassof's elbow, smoking a pipe of vile Circassian tobacco, stood a born rogue, one Nickolai Bubn. A squat, grinning, Gipsy-blood Volgan; a cowardly, merry, worldly-wicked fellow of rascally habits and appetites. His right ear had gone the way of an alley brawl—bitten off by a wench, it was said. And he bore a cutlas swipe across the back of his head. With him discretion was not only the better part, but the whole of valor. He carried himself with the peacock airs of a commodore. The crew had dubbed him "the Admiral" in irony of his valetship, and also from his habit of standing wide-legged at the rail, searching the horizon through a telescope the size of a large thumb. He was the doggedly faithful, devoted servant of the *Diomede* captain.

Ion Korelin, owner and captain and free trader, stood a pace in front of Prior Ioassof. He was a brown, lithe man of scant twenty-eight, firm-jawed and even a little too resolute of his purpose. In his sash-belt hung a longsword that touched the deck. His clothes were of blue velvet and Chinese silk. As former captain on an Imperial vessel, he had worked a swift and fell destruction among the sea-going, murderous Chukchi of Siberia.

"The Bering Wolf," he was called by the *promyshleniki* captains of Kamchatka in seaman tribute to his relentless courage. A name which well enough befitted his seamanship, his resourcefulness and his temper when it was aroused, but a name which belied his warmness of heart and his strange cleaving to honor and ideals amid all the rapine and robbery and bloody-handed activity of the early fur trade.

In the far-away Caucasus, where he was born to a comfortable heritage among the lesser nobility, he had been stirred by tales of the *Bolshaia Zemlia*, the Great Land Westward. In the stalls of fur merchants he had seen priceless pelts of strange animals from that unknown El Dorado of the far Pacific. His restless manhood was drawn as irresistibly as by a lodestar. He left his heritage to a brother, joined a caravan of Muscovite merchants and treked overland with his servant to Kamchatka, a two-year's journey.

---

* Islands.

THIS nobility had gained him a lieutenancy in the Imperial navy. His merit raised him in three seasons to a captaincy. After his solitary campaigns against the Chukchi, he heard one winter of an abandoned vessel wrecked on the Kirile Reefs. With a *bidarra* crew he went out and rescued her, brought her into Petropavlovsk, remade her into the *Diomede* and thereafter roved and traded to his own liking.

To his own rich profit, also, since the three voyages had been prosperous beyond his hopes. For one good reason, he had ventured northeast up the "Fire-Breathers" almost to the mainland, seven hundred miles beyond competition. Island and sea furs were plentiful there, and the Attoonaians bartered for him with the Mainlanders, bringing him Alaskan ermine and dark, precious fox.

For another and still better reason, he treated the natives honorably and won them to him by just trading methods. He supplied them with sea-otter nets to use in the floating kelp fields. He gave them superior iron weapons and traps for the hunt. He traded out only such goods as the natives would benefit by. His reward was a rich cargo and peace.

Most of his brother traders had ships of twice the *Diomede's* tonnage. They carried heavy armaments and large crews of fighters and frequently they banded together for greater strength. Perpetually they were at cruel warfare with the Aleuts. Often enough the long-suffering natives rose suddenly, blotted out the *promyshleniki*—Cossack hunters—and destroyed the ships in just, bloody vengeance.

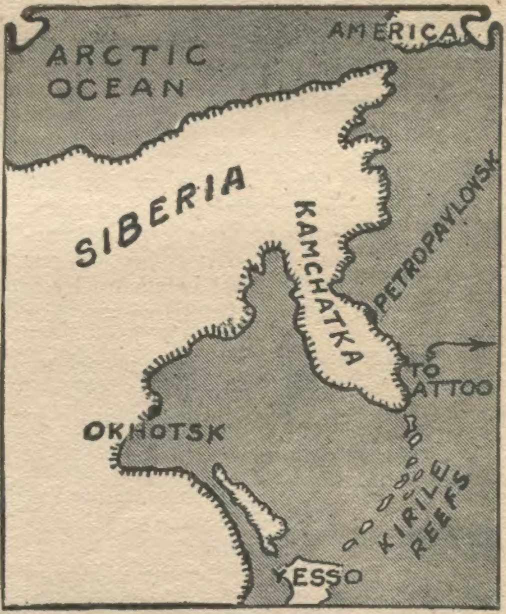
But in his small vessel, with six guns and a scanty crew of fifteen men, Ion Korelin had boldly gone north to the rich island, Attoonai, where the natives were more vigorous than the Andreanof islanders and where the unknown Mainlanders, fifty versts across a Straits, were more savage than even the Siberian Chukchi. Ashore he had put up a mere *artel**, or unfortified trade-house of slabbing. Yet in three years he had not lost a man nor fired a musket in battle with the Attoonaians.

He stood now shading his eyes from the slant morning sun, and gazing ahead at the line of reefs.

"Bring my sea-glass from the cabin, rogue," he ordered the Admiral. "Mate Lyov Vassiutkinski is at breakfast. Tell him we will up anchor and sail in immediately, when I discover our former passage."

"The harborage?" Prior Ioassof queried.

"Straight east," said Korelin, pointing to the curving bay-head. "At the upper reach, a musket shot from the landwash stands my *artel*, hidden now. And behind the *artel* is the chief village of the Attoonaians. When we start into the harbor you will see a fleet of kayaks and *bidarras* shoot out to welcome us."



With his glass he searched for the reef passage, found it and gave orders to Lyov, the mate. Under an easy press of sail the *Diomede* clipped over the dangerous white line and stood in for the harbor.

A two-pounder falconet amidships barked salute. The bay-head swam slowly into view.

But no native fleet, no *bidarra* nor even a lone kayak skimmed out from the sandy beach.

"Strange!" remarked the captain. "Kadu, the *tyone*, should be aboard by now, and his hunters should be swarming over the rails and stealing everything that is loose. I beg the glass again, holy friend."

---

* *Artel*, like our word "post," can mean a hunting and trading establishment generally or the building alone.

He turned the piece upon the bay-head and searched the shore. His brows knit as he looked. Bewilderment spread over his face. He paled and swore softly.

"Ye have mistaken the harbor?" asked Prior Ioassof, noting his blank puzzlement.

Korelin shook his head without speaking. Putting the glass to his eye again, he gazed a long minute at the bay-head, scarcely three versts distant now.

The glass came down slowly. He turned to the Prior and wetted his lips.

"Village, *artel* and my cabin of stores are gone!" he announced, quietly.

Prior Ioassof blessed himself, and the Admiral even forgot his pipe.

"Surely," said the prior, "ye have mistaken the harbor, Ion Korelin?"

He slighted the question.

"I can see a black heap where the *artel* stood, and the slabs of the demolished cabin. There are the poles of the village. Something is all amiss here at Attoonai. In our absence a disaster has befallen. Lyov Vassiutkinski, bring to before we are in a trap!"

With the *Diomede* swinging at anchor halfway into the harborage, the crew of Russians gathered around their leader in the bows. The long glass went from hand to hand. They swore round oaths, oblivious of the prior's presence. Dumbfounded, they stared at the desolate shore and then at each other, utterly astounded.

Beyond shadow of doubt the village of three hundred souls was forsaken, the *artel* burned, the cabin of stores rifled and demolished.

"Last night," the Admiral spoke up, "I had a dream, and we were all murdered and our throats cut by an army of foxes and bears, and my master was dangled from a mainmast."

"Silence, rogue!" Korelin bade him tersely, noting that the crew already were uneasy enough. "You should go to bed supperless and escape those dreams."

"The miserable lice* have stolen our stores and burned our *artel!*" swore a gunner, Sidor Savelief. "And then moved their village inland beyond retaliation from our pieces."

"They have not!" the captain objected firmly. "An Aleut people is timid, but never traitorous to a friend. They were obedient to Kadu, and he, I swear, was loyal to me. Besides no soul on this island had cause to harm us."

"Then what, pray ye, hath happened, Ion Korelin?" Prior Ioassof exclaimed.

"That, holy friend, is a question."

"We had best catch the first wind and get out of here and sail away," quaked the Admiral, who was apprehensively scanning the near shores with his toy telescope.

"You will catch a blow on the ear, coward! What this strange desolation and destruction means I cannot guess. But we will discover its meaning. And if an enemy has worked us this harm, we will square with him."

THE Admiral had caught sight of something lurking among the sand dunes and willows of the right-hand shore. He stood wide-legged, twirling his ridiculous glass for a better view and staring so hard that his mouth was open.

"Now what?" asked Korelin. "You are forever seeing things with that bauble."

"It is something, master. A white rag, a man's head—on a stick. I mean the rag—"

Korelin seized his long glass and turned it upon the spot where his servant pointed. He took one full look.

"By the Holy Name! It is Kadu himself, signaling to us! Waving us to come ashore to him."

"It is likely a trap," said the mate. "However—"

"Yea, however!" The captain took the sentence from his lips. "That 'however' is a man's word, Lyov Vassiutkinski. We must go ashore and see. Lower a boat with six men armed. Rogue, fetch my pistols."

A *bidarra* was made ready. Six Russians climbed down to it. Prior Ioassof borrowed a double-barreled pistol and cutlass and stepped uninvited into the boat. Ion Korelin merely nodded, yet the prior's courage in face of an unknown danger heightened his admiration for this man of religion.

"We will all be murdered and our throats cut as I dreamed," groaned the Admiral, pulling a listless oar.

"Even so, that is more honorable than to run away from danger and insult and flee back to Petropavlovsk where alley wenches bite off ears," his master admonished. "Be silent, croaker, or I'll cut your tongue out as I have promised."

---

* It is a curious fact that the *promyshleniki* called the natives by a term very like our "vermin."

When the *bidarra* grounded, the captain and prior waded ashore, the rogue splashing along at their heels. Cautiously and circumspectly they made their way to the sand dune a hundred paces inland. As they came within a dozen steps, a tall native rose up from his covert.

He was bareheaded, gaunt, tattered and fugitive. His trousers were of patched canvas and his upper cotton garment had bleached and faded white. Yet about him a dignity clung still, the courage and the bearing of a *tyone*.

Ion Korelin fairly gasped at the sight of him, thus appearing.

"Kadu! What is the meaning? Your village desolate, my buildings rifled and destroyed, and you—?"

The *tyone* advanced. He shook hands with the captain, nodded to the Admiral and looked a question at Prior Ioassof, whose first voyage this was to Attoonai.

"I have hidden here for half a moon, brother," said he in the Aleut. "For half a moon I have looked out to sea for the white wings of the *Diomede*, returning to us."

At the captain's gesture the three men sat down. The *Tyone* squatted on his heels, though as he spoke he kept rising and looking about him over the sand dunes.

"LAST autumn after you left us," Kadu continued, taking his own time, "we obeyed your instructions and began gathering peltry for your return. My own hunters brought in sea-otter and seal, and combed the islands for fox. I sent *bidarras* to the mainland tribes, and for their furs I bartered the stores which you entrusted to me. For five moons the peltry kept damming up, awaiting you. I had amassed more than in any two previous springs.

"Then one morning, now two moons ago, two tall ships came sailing into this harbor. I thought it was you returning with new strange vessels. We started out in our kayak fleet to give you welcome. We were only a long bow-shot away, brother, when we learned our mistake.

"Whether they thought we were going to attack them or whether evil and bloodshed were in their hearts from the first, I can not say. It does not matter. Suddenly a row of great guns boomed in our very faces. Twenty kayaks were torn in two, and sunk. Men with shoulder-guns shot and killed those of my hunters who struggled in the water. We survivors turned and fled in terror for the shore. Before we reached it the great guns boomed again. Ten more skin-boats sank. We scurried for shelter among the willows and sand dunes, terrified and distraught, for you, brother, had never acquainted us with the horror of the great guns.

"The ships sailed in as closely as they could. All that day the guns roared. They flung iron missiles into our village. With our women and children we were driven inland where their guns could not kill us.

"Toward evening half a hundred armed men came ashore in five *bidarras*. They seized the *artel* you had built, the furs I had amassed in it for you and the stores that remained in the cabin. They shot our wounded who had not escaped. They burned our village till only a few poles remained.

"No messenger was sent to us to tell us the demands of the strangers. We were slaughtered and our habitations destroyed without our knowing why. I understood then that even as there are treacherous men among my people, so there must be thieves and evil-hearted men of white skin like your own.

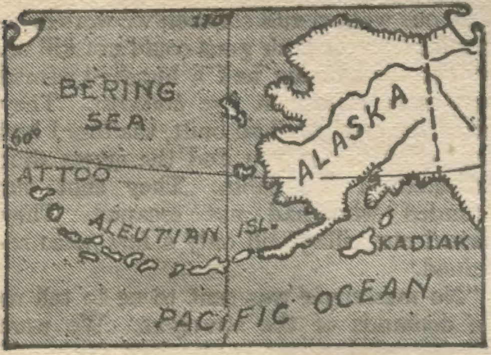
"That night when the shooting stopped and our courage came back somewhat to us, I gathered one hundred and fifty of my hunters. We planned a night attack to avenge ourselves and to protect the furs that were rightfully yours. We struck the camp on two sides at once with bows and harpoons. But in the face of fire from their shoulder-guns, my hunters could not stand. They broke and fled. Thirty of them were slain.

"The next morning armed bodies of the white men came inland. They destroyed our smaller camps, they shot every hunter whom they laid eyes upon. That continued for three days while the furs and stores were taken on board the ships. And it continued even afterward. To stop the slaughter of my defenseless people, I went alone to the camp, blowing swan down before me as a sign of peace. The white men seized me and dragged me to their leaders, a pair of blood-stained traders who ordered and directed the cruelties.

" 'You have had your lesson,' said they. 'Now bring us hostages and furs.'

"I promised. I was powerless. My people were being hunted down and slain. The traders had one hundred and thirty men, all armed and red-handed and cruel as I could never be to a beast. I gave them twelve of my hunters as hostages and brought them furs to trade.

"But their trading ways, brother, were very strange. One-fifth of our peltry they took in the name of a man called God. Another fifth, in the name of a man called Czar. In his own name each of the traders took a fifth. For the remainder they bartered at the rate of an iron chisel for a sea-otter's skin.



"When our furs were gone, they demanded more. They demanded as much peltry as we gathered for you. But that we gathered willingly, sure of just trading and fair treatment. Now my men had no heart for the hunt, and the Mainlanders would not give us furs. The traders were enraged. They hanged our hostages on the spars of the vessels and started the man-hunt against us again.

"I went down and tried to plead with them. I was seized and kept a prisoner. Part of my people escaped to the mainland. Eighty of the younger hunters are hiding on Attoonai, as I am, defiant but helpless. The rest of my people have submitted and are hunting now in slavery to the murderers."

"Are hunting now?" echoed Korelin, who had listened in stark silence to the story. "Then are these traders still here?"

Kadu pointed east across the neck of Attoonai to the eastern harbor and took up his tale of misery again.

"When they had looted and stolen your possessions and burned your *artel*, they sailed around the north headland and established themselves in the east bay. In their ships they crossed the Straits to the mainland shore after furs and timber for their fortress. I was carried along, a prisoner, as interpreter. They landed parties and secured the timber, but the Mainlanders gave up no peltry. Instead they fought the intruders savagely, retreating inland after each attack. The traders burned several villages and then returned here to Attoonai and built their fortress. They have not stripped all the furs from this and our neighboring islands. They have not yet worked their full iniquity upon us.

"My people are only a remnant of what they were, and most of these survivors are enslaved. This island which was our peaceful home now howls with the slaughter and destruction carried through its length and breadth. Our villages are gone, few of our children are alive, our women have suffered at the hands of the white crews. Where was happiness now is misery."

ION KORELIN sat silent stroking his chin. He turned his eyes away from the *tyone*, for Kadu had bowed his head and was weeping.

It was no new tale in his ears. Among the Andreanof *ostrova* he had witnessed such deeds himself. In spite of Imperial *oukases* commanding just treatment of the Aleuts, in spite of honorable captains who set worthy examples, there were traders whose unchecked lust for rich cargoes made beasts of them. The Imperial Navy was a few cranky vessels. No master hand had yet appeared, as Baranof did a half-century later, to weld the fur traders into one company and put down outrages. Each *promyshleniki* captain did as he listed.

Yet for sheer wanton slaughter and cruelty the story surpassed any Korelin had ever heard. Fair and peaceful Attoonai, he pictured the island as he had left it the previous autumn, and now as the traders had stricken it in two short months.

A fire blazed to white heat within him. In that moment a purpose leaped full-fledged into his brain.

"I am sorry, Kadu," he said quietly. "Sorry for the slaughter of your people and the misery of your island home. I am ashamed of my white skin. I grieve as you do for your slain who befriended and honored me. All that lies in my power I shall do to secure them swift justice. Will you guide me across to this fortress?"

The *tyone* looked up in alarm.

"Surely, brother, you will not venture—"

"I shall speak with them first. Then—" he tapped the hilt of his sword— "Come!"

As the party walked back to the *bidarra* Korelin retold the story. Prior Ioassof crossed himself in horror, and his dark eyes lit up with a fire that scarcely was pious.

After ordering the boat back to the *Diomede* with instructions for the vessel to lie at anchor and await his return, Korelin and his party started across the island neck for the traders' harbor.

They came in sight of it by noon, for across the fifteen versts they set a swift pace. From a thicket of devil's club where the captain bade Kadu stay in hiding, they looked down at the enemy's haven.

On the shore, four hundred paces beyond the reach of storm-tide, an *ostrog* had been erected. A spacious log building which was fortress and dwelling and a magazine for stores and furs. On each corner a a nine-pound cannon, with small falconets thrust through loopholes along the sides. A twelve-foot palisade of sharpened poles surrounded it for additional protection. One gate faced the beach; another faced inland. Both were open, both heavily guarded by Cossacks.

Within the palisade and built against it were several hovels. A pistol shot east from the fortress were three dozen *yurts*, miserable half-cave, half-hut shelters of the enslaved Aleut hunters; mere sand-bank niches covered over with sail-cloth. A couple dozen kayaks were drawn upon the landwash and a hunting party of fifteen, bossed by a Cossack *promyshlenik*, was just then returning from sea-ottering. Two *bidarras* were plying between the beach and the ships in harbor. A knot of twenty men stood about a pile of stores and furs on the sand.

Two ten-gun sloops rode at anchor a verst offshore. They were strange sails to Korelin, but Prior Ioassof, being of Okhotsk, recognized them instantly and knew their owners.

"The north vessel belongeth to one Gerassim Berg, and the south to the one Urey Zakhar. Both sloops are of Okhotsk port. Both men are free traders. Both of them have reputation as soulless devils."

Through the sea-glass, Prior Ioassof looked at the knot of men and handed the piece back to the captain.

"They are there at the landing now. See those three men yon by themselves? That red-headed bear is Gerassim Berg, the smaller is Urey Zakhar. That gaunt old man I cannot see clearly."

Kadu looked, and answered the captain's question—

"He is Ivan Nadayof, their master of stores," Korelin interpreted.

"I know him well, and his daughter!" Prior Ioassof exclaimed. "A man of some godliness, though weak of will. But what doth he do with these ships? I myself saw him sail from Okhotsk on the *Hipolite*.*"

"Nevertheless his name is Ivan Nadayof," Kadu repeated.

Through the glass Korelin looked again at the crew on the beach. They were a roughened lot, sea vagabonds by nature, and doubly hardened by the example of their leaders. Yet they were the typical *promyshleniki*—squat, broad-bodied, half-Cossack, half-Kamchatkan, hairy-faced, clothed in canvas and furs, and bristling with cutlas, pistol and musket. Coursing through Bering waters, fighting and plundering the natives, high-handed piracy of furs and native women and choice islands were the food and drink of their lives. Save for Ivan Nadayof, not a man in sight was over thirty-five; for Bering Sea *promyshleniki* in those early days did not live to be old.

Korelin rose.

"Come," said he, "we lose time."

They walked down to the palisade gate facing inland. The guards there challenged them, but seeing them white men, permitted them to enter. One Cossack hurried down to the landing with word that Ion Korelin would speak with Gerassim Berg and Urey Zakhar. Another led them to the *ostrog* door, seated them there and went within. He came out in a minute bearing three glasses of sarana fern wine.

The Admiral drained his at a gulp, squared his shoulders, put on his best quarter-deck airs, and stalked away to find the source. Prior Ioassof sipped his liquor slowly as he wiped his shaven poll and glanced about the yard.

"There is sickness in those hovels," the captain observed. "Scurvy certainly, and perhaps the neck-swelling caused by these fogs."

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* Pronounced Hi-pól-i-te, four syllables.

It was a shrewd word to get the good prior out of the road.

"Till ye have need of me—"

He rose.

Ion Korelin nodded and was alone. He held his glass in front of him, untasted. Slowly he tilted it. The green wine poured upon the sand.

"Is my hospitality then so odious?"

THE young captain turned sharply at the words, and rose to his feet. His glance moved up a graceful form past a rounded throat and a face of winsome beauty, till his eyes met the deep brown eyes of the girl.

In his not altogether staid youth Ion Korelin had admired the dancing girls of Circassia and lightly-wooed young beauties of the Caspian cities. Perhaps his astonishment at finding in that far, raw region a girl such as she, perhaps the suddenness of her breaking upon his presence, made him think her lovelier than any girl he had in his life beheld. She was twenty or twenty-one, brown-haired, and her eyes were sorcery.

After a moment of their mutual appraisal, he noted that on her left hand she wore a ring, her only ornament, with a crest of nobility that matched his own.

She smiled, and warm sunlight seemed to break in upon the young captain's dark thoughts. He bowed instinctively, though his tongue yet failed him.

"Is my hospitality then so odious?"

He caught his breath.

"Nay, I did not know the giver. And I, Ion Korelin, do not yet know."

She started perceptibly at the mention of his name, as if she knew that name's repute. Her eyes quickened.

"The Bering Wolf?"

"I am called that from my ship's emblem. You are Ivan Nadayof's daughter?"

She inclined her head. He grew conscious that his stare was rude.

"We have expected the *Diomede*," she said after a moment.

"We?" he asked, sharply.

She winced at the meaning, the questions loaded into that single word.

"The *Hipolite*, in which my father and I sailed from Okhotsk, was wrecked in the Andreanof's. We two and fifteen of the *Hipolite's promyshleniki* were rescued by these sloops in harbor and brought here."

"Prisoners?"

"No. My father was made master of stores, his position on the *Hipolite*. The *promyshleniki* perforce accepted service under the free traders."

"And you?"

She did not answer.

Korelin's ears caught the crunch of footsteps.

"Yonder," said he, pointing to the prior's broad back at the mouth of a hovel, "is an Okhotsk friend of yours, Prior Ioassof. Will you greet him?"

She knew he was bidding her leave him before the traders came. She nodded and, as she stepped out of the door, stood face to face a moment with him.

"I can guess the purpose of your bold visit here, Ion Korelin. High words will only lead to anger. Speak softly. You are one man."

She slipped away, and he saw the cordial greeting between her and the prior. They fell into earnest conversation.

A few minutes later four men came around the corner of the *ostrog*. One of them was the Cossack messenger. Another, Ivan Nadayof, a flour-faced, methodic clerk of fifty-five, an unimportant, weak-willed and silent man, wearing about his neck a string of calculating balls as the badge of his clerkship.

The other two were Gerassim Berg and his partner in crime, Urey Zakhar.

They both were men lacking the vestige of honor or soul—traders who amassed their peltry by liquor, clubs, musket balls and the aid of the devil. But with that, their likeness ended. Berg was a huge-bodied, red-haired giant, his face purple-splotched from excessive *vodka*. The strong instincts of his brute nature were sprawled openly on his features. He had driving power, an iron-handed rule over his men and the natives.

Zakhar was smaller, wiry and very dark. He was slyer, a dissembler who could keep his thoughts to himself. His was the brains of the partnership, the evil cunning.

They were a strange pair to be consorting, oddly contrasted, different in basic temperament. The bonds that held them together were not friendship ties. With men of their kidney, friendship was a thing impossible. Mutual services held them together, and mutual dangers.

Korelin stood silent looking steadily at them. To their unabashed "*Zdorovo!*" he gave no reply. Berg thrust out a hand. Zakhar knew better.

"I am Ion Korelin, captain of the *Diomede*," he began abruptly.

"So our messenger informed us," Zakhar fenced.

"I have certain words to say to you."

"We are listening," Zakhar replied, while Gerassim Berg drew back his scorned hand and looked at it as if there were some physical reason why it should not have been taken.

"Have you Imperial letters patent, permitting you to trade among uncharted islands?" the captain asked.

"You are no longer in the Imperial service, Ion Korelin," Zakhar countered. "What letters patent we have is thus no concern of yours."

"Mayhap. But the furs you stole from the *artel* you burned are my furs, and thus concern enough of mine."

Gerassim Berg guffawed.

"That point of ownership would be hard to prove," said Zakhar, "inasmuch as we found them on an uncharted island in the possession of natives and fought for them and possess them—"

"This island of Attoonai," Ion Korelin spoke on, disdaining argument, "is properly mine for trading by right of discovery, by right of *artel* built upon it, by right of its owner's consent."

"It is ours by right of twenty guns and a hundred and twenty men!" Berg said bluntly.

"When God is so high in his heavens and the Czar so far away," quoth Zakhar, "those rights stand."

He kissed his hand ceremoniously at mention of the Czar.

"What free trader in these waters recognizes any other right?" Berg demanded.

"My word to you is this"—said Korelin, speaking not as if he thought his demands would be accepted, but rather as if laying down a declaration of war—"You shall return to me my furs together with the stores which you stole. You shall return this island to me. You shall go aboard my ship in irons, and be taken back to Petropavlovsk to a fair trial for your crimes against these natives."

GERASSIM BERG purpled. His eyes stood out.

"And if we should happen to refuse, my Bering Wolf?" Zakhar sneered. "What then?"

"War!" said the captain quietly.

It was an ominous word that brought a moment's ominous silence.

"Then by the devil's beard we will start and end it here!" Berg thundered, as he drew sword.

The next instant his weapon was knocked out of his hands, and Korelin's blade was at his throat. And in the next instant Zakhar whipped out a pistol. The captain would have been shot down unawares had not a sharp cry from the Nadayof girl warned him. With a back-handed sweep he knocked the pistol spinning. Its bullet lodged in the *ostrog* wall above his head.

The thieves were for the moment weaponless. Prior Ioassof and the girl came running up, and the Admiral, for all his usual cowardice, dashed out of the *ostrog* to aid his master.

"Shame be upon ye!" cried the prior hotly. "Would two of ye attack one man who came willingly into thy power, and slay him before a woman's eyes? Ion Korelin, put up thy sword!"

Berg sidled to his blade and picked it up. Zakhar's left hand traveled toward another bulge in his sash belt. Both traders were furious with rage. Their plain intent was to kill.

"Stop, Gerassim Berg!" the Nadayof girl bade him. "Ion Korelin has powerful friends. If you slay him, no port of the Okhotsk Sea will be safe haven for you. Are you not strong enough in men and guns and ships to laugh at his threat of war?"

Her argument was sound enough, but cool reason alone would not have prevailed against the anger of the traders. It was something in her mere appeal, in her voice and mien, which had strange power over Gerassim Berg. His eyes met hers. He sheathed his sword, muttering in his beard. Zakhar fell in with him.

Ion Korelin marveled. He knew she had saved his life by virtue of his influence over Berg.

Prior Ioassof plucked him by the arm.

"Come, while ye are free to come."

They strode toward the palisade gate, the Admiral trudging along behind. No one raised a hand to stop them. The guards at the gate stared in awe at the captain, for by now they knew he was the Bering Wolf.

They crossed the first sand ridge, joined Kadu again and were two versts away before Korelin spoke. His words then showed that his thoughts were of Ivan Nadayof's daughter.

"I remarked, holy friend, the warmth of your greeting with Madamoiselle Nadayof. You must know her well. I am all curious to discover what it means to find here a girl such as she."

"She asked me concerning ye, and now—" the good prior smiled blandly—"ye ask of her. Her mother was the wife of a political exile, a count, at Okhotsk. When he died she married Ivan Nadayof, more for protection, I surmise, than for love. Elena is their daughter, wholly like her mother, who died three years ago in the plague."

"Elena," the captain mused. "But what, holy friend, does she in this lonely island wilderness?"

"She sailed on the *Hipolite* with her father to escape persecution in Okhotsk. I heard rumors of it, a *voivod*, nobleman, there, haughty in his Imperial governorship. She hath courage, Ion Korelin, which her father lacketh, else she would not have gone voyaging. Courage and a dangerous beauty."

"What was the meaning behind her gesture to Gerassim Berg and her influence over the traders? Can you read that riddle, holy friend?"

"I think a woman's tragedy lieth behind it, Ion Korelin. She told me nothing. I but lay a guess. When these soulless traders rescued the *Hipolite* survivors, they found Ivan Nadayof useful to them in his storekeeper's capacity, for their ruffian crew are not fit for responsible or honest work.

"Perforce Elena Nadayof came along. Think ye a girl of her beauty could live here without being beset by those two devils? I think she playeth a desperate game. I think she playeth them one against the other. I think she pretendeth to incline toward Gerassim Berg, for him, as ye have seen, she can control better than the wily Zakhar. Berg is too hot-tempered to walk second. He would flare up and force issue, were she to favor Zakhar.

"The latter is content to bide his time. I may guess wrong. Holy Writ warneth against reading the mind of women, and ye have seen especially that the eyes of Elena Nadayof are fathomless and her sweet self elusive. But so I read the situation. It hangeth perilous. She is saved and shielded by their mutual jealousy. But save a miracle from the one and one only God, she must sooner or later fall to the lust of one of them."

"We," said the captain, "must strive to be that miracle, holy friend."

"But how? They have three times our guns and eight times our men. Even if some of thy friends be at Attoo and ready to aid, before we can sail there and back these traders will have gone, and she with them."

"It is true. We would be too late. It is all within our own hands."

"What do you mean?" asked the prior, perplexed.

"I mean we must fight!"

"Fight?" Prior Ioassof echoed, incredulous. "Ion Korelin, can ye mean it?"

"There is nothing else in honor we can do."

"We can escape, master," the Admiral put in sagely. "Honor is a troublesome thing, best chucked overboard."

"It is madness!" Prior Ioassof argued vehemently, though his face was white. "Ye but rush on to destruction. How can ye hope to win?"

"I scarcely hope. To win would be the miracle you spoke of. Victory, it seems, is beyond our power. But we must nevertheless fight. By our honor and our manhood and the God against whom these sins have been done, we are bound to fight. Does a man strive for mere victory, or in defense of those things which he holds sacred?"

"Ye mean," quoth Prior Ioassof softly, as if now for the first time the scriptural words had real significance to him. "Ye mean, be not afraid nor dismayed by reason of this great multitude, for the battle is not thine, but God's."

"Nay, no crusader's fervor, holy friend. My simple purpose is to uphold my own honor, to avenge these slaughtered Attoonaians, my loyal friends, and to save Elena Nadayof. Busy yourself therefore with the souls of our men tonight, for tomorrow we are going into battle."

THE next day at noon the *Diomede* rounded the north headland and started down the east coast. A shout went up suddenly from her crew.

Five versts ahead were the twin sloops of the enemy.

"*Dies irae!*" cried a Russian, a monk gone wrong. "They have come out to meet us."

The *Diomede* veered seaward for more

maneuvering space. The sloops tacked and stood across her course, beating heavily against the adverse, fitful breeze. Steadily brigantine and sloops closed up, silent and cleared for action, till only a long musket shot separated them and till the enemy vessels were slowly turning to bring their broadsides into play.

Watching and waiting for this move, the captain shouted a sudden order. The *Diomede* yawed sharply starboard, caught the wind full, and careened past the vessels, a mere pistol shot astern of them. Her guns crashed grape and chain shot into their crowded decks. Her Russians took deadly aim with their long rifles, seized a second weapon and fired again.

So quick the maneuver, and so neatly Lyov Vassiutkinski handled the brigantine that she had pirouetted off to safety before the sloops veered round and retaliated with an angry, harmless broadside. A few musket balls through her canvas had been her sole injury, whereas the enemy lost a dozen men slain outright and as many more wounded.

"By the heavens!" the captain exclaimed to Prior Ioassof who crouched beside him. "A few more times of that and we will fight on equal terms."

But never again in that long and bloody afternoon did the brigantine achieve the strategy.

For two hours the vessels maneuvered and hammered away at long range. Lyov Vassiutkinski handled the *Diomede* in masterly fashion, else she would several times have been trapped and raked by heavy broadsides. The enemy vessels were clumsy, but they were two against one and each a twice heavier ship. Feint and veer and scheme as she would, the *Diomede* could not cross their bows or careen past their sterns again.

Smarting with impatience, the captain resolved to close in. He caught Zakhar's vessel a few minutes beyond help from her consort. The *Diomede* bore straight down, took a heavy broadside from five guns, took a crash of musketry, and then, slewing around a biscuit-toss distant, she poured in her own deliberate broadside and deadly musketry. Two of Zakhar's guns were knocked out. The mainmast hung quivering, half shot away by the shrewd gunnery of Sidor Savelief. A shout of triumph went up from the *Diomede*.

Side by side the two vessels clung, fighting savagely, at even odds of guns, tilting their heavy pieces at one another's wind-water line, sweeping each other's deck with falconet-grape and musketry.

It was too savage a fight at such close range to last long. One way or another it would have ended quickly. But Gerassim Berg had managed to bring his vessel around, and was swooping down to succor his consort. Barely in time the *Diomede* saw her peril of being caught between the two sloops. With a parting broadside she veered off reluctantly and brought up three versts away to take count.

Two of her Russians were dead. Below deck the prior was ministering to three others mortally wounded. The Admiral had disappeared. The ship's carpenter was working like a Thor at a huge hole, mercifully above the waterline. Guns and gunners had escaped unscathed, and the rigging was little damaged.

"We came off best by far," the captain remarked to Lyov Vassiutkinski as he scanned Zakhar's ship with his seaglass. "But here are nine men left against seven times as many yonder, and here are six guns against their eighteen."

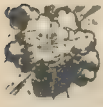
When his first strategy had succeeded so marvelously, Ion Korelin's hope of victory had risen, despite the madness of such a thought. But now the faint hope faded. He had tested the mettle of his enemy and their skill at sea-battling. Man for man and gun for gun, he was far and away their superior. He could have whipped twice and likely three times his odds. But not four times or five times that.

Two courses only were open to him. He could forsake the battle and slink away, or sell victory to his enemies at a dear price. Discretion, as the Admiral would have counseled, or valor, which his nine powder-blackened and bloodied Russians were clamoring for.

He laid his plans very coolly but quickly, for the afternoon was far gone. All the falconets were carried to the starboard side and lashed there. The shelter plates on that side were doubled. The deck was sanded, muskets and pistols freshly loaded and longswords piled to hand. Solemnly and tearfully the good prior gave the Russians his blessing.

When everything was ready, the *Diomede* stood in again at her enemy.

By skillful maneuvering and by pretending to seek a fight, the brigantine gradually drew Gerassim Berg's sloop away from her slower-moving consort. Then, accepting a broadside as the price of her strategy, the *Diomede* swung back suddenly, clipped down at Zakhar's vessel and closed for the finale.



ALL hands were at the guns. The two vessels drifted one hundred paces apart. Zakhar tried to work close and grapple, wherein his odds of men would have been overwhelming. But his shattered mainmast went by the board and he was helpless. The evening calm, moreover, had settled.

Two versts away Gerassim Berg threw out boats to tow his sloop within effective range. His approach was by inches and all too late. His consort was doomed, and with her, the valiant *Diomede*.

Shattered and sinking slowly, their sails and masts shot away, the two vessels drifted in toward the north headland where the *Diomede* five hours before had started her hopeless battle. Musketry had ceased now, for smoke wreathed the vessels and the cool twilight was deepening. Only the guns and falconets roared and barked. They too were lessening. Zakhar's deck was a shamble, his sloop a splintered wreck on fire. The *Diomede* was battered and fast sinking. A falconet in her bows and a nine-pounder amidships still answered the enemy.

Then suddenly all the guns on Zakhar's vessel ceased. A hoarse, shuddering groan came out of the smoke that hung about her.

The captain rose up from the falconet he had been working and peered at his enemy. As the brigantine slowly passed and as the smoke shrouding the sloop fell to the water, he saw nothing save a spar thrust up out of the waves, betokening that the wreck had plunged. A handful of survivors clung to boarding in the water.

He stumbled down the deck of the *Diomede*. He became aware that his right hand smarted. The middle finger hung by a shred. He stared at it, dazed, and jerked it off.

Behind heavy timbers, Lyov Vassiutkinski and Sidor Savelief, the gunner, had kept alive and worked the nine-pounder. The rest of the crew were dead or dying. He stumbled, still in a daze, to the companionway and went below. Prior Ioassof was giving the rites of a faith not his own to a dying Russian. He finished and followed the captain on deck.

"What now, Ion Korelin?" he asked, not able to realize all that had happened.

"What lay in our power we have done. The dying are in God's hands. We who survive must take thought now for ourselves. Unless we sink before then, we shall ground within a verst. Let us make shift to get ashore on Attoonai."

Every boat was splintered beyond semblance of a boat. The four men worked feverishly at roping some planks together. The *Diomede* shuddered. The gurgle below deck swelled to an ominous sough. Still, the staunch brigantine drifted on. She struck finally and keeled over till her deck was at half an angle. The raft was slid over the rail. The four men boarded.

They were a couple rods away when the captain, looking back with a bloodless face at his beloved ship, swore suddenly.

Out of a porthole, spluttering and choking, clambered the Admiral, like a rat washed out of the safety it had sought.

He pulled his cap tight on his head, dived, came up spouting and splashed furiously for the raft. He started explaining while he was still several strokes away.

"I took over Mikhail's gun when Mikhail was killed during the battle. With the gun I shot a duel with an enemy gunner, and just after I knocked his gun out I had to run below deck to plug up a hole which would otherwise have sunk us like a shot."

In spite of everything the four men laughed.

The Admiral snorted.

"If you will not take the truth from me, maybe you will take warning. Yonder comes one of Gerassim Berg's boats to see what is left of us. I saw it when I climbed out of the porthole. In another minute they will spy—"

The survivors cut short their laugh. Slipping into the water, they unlashed the ropes that held the raft together. Berg's boat came into view and stopped at the brigantine, but the four men keeping deep in the water were invisible in the twilight.

The captain and his rogue on one plank, Lyov Vassiutkinski and Sidor the gunner on the second and the lusty prior with an arm across a third, the *Diomede* survivors drifted toward the dark shore.

II

WHEN the party reached water shoaly enough to wade, Ion Korelin called the other two planks to him.

"Our first care is for our immediate safety. When our enemies back yonder search the *Diomede* and fail to find our bodies, they may become suspicious and, suspicious, they may scour this headland for us. We must not go ashore here over this sand where our tracks will show. We must wade south two or three versts and then hurry inland till our strength fails."

"We will all be dead anyway and our throats cut," groaned the Admiral. "So let us go straight ashore and sleep."

"Silence, bilge-rat. Come."

Three versts south he led his party over a landwash of rock shingle and wiry grass. Until midnight they pressed steadily inland, and then, stumbling by blind luck into a sand-crater hiding, he allowed them to stop and rest.

He himself sat up during the dark hours.

In the chill and quiet night he could think calmly, could look back on all that had happened in a brief few hours. It was well-nigh impossible to realize that the *Diomede* was a sunken wreck, all his crew dead save the mate and gunner, and the five survivors fugitive and faced with death. He realized it finally and fully, yet he regretted nothing; it had to be.

The brazen theft of his furs and stores, and the usurpation of his rightful territory meant little to him compared with this impending crime against womanhood and with the desolation spread throughout the island. Fair and green and peaceful Attoonai! The words were ghostly mockery. Where formerly lived an inoffensive sea-people, gaining a plentiful living from the sea, were now a remnant of enslaved and miserable natives; an island of lonely graves, of footpaths unused, and the skeleton poles of villages destroyed.

Resolutely he put the irrevocable and tragic past out of mind and looked forward to what he should do.

At dawn the four men roused from their heavy slumber and sat up.

"What now, Captain?" asked Lyov Vassiutkinski. "We are without food, water or weapons except your sword. We cannot stir without being discovered. How can we manage to live? Have you answer to that?"

"I am going to find Kadu. I will do that myself. You others stay here. I will return when I return."

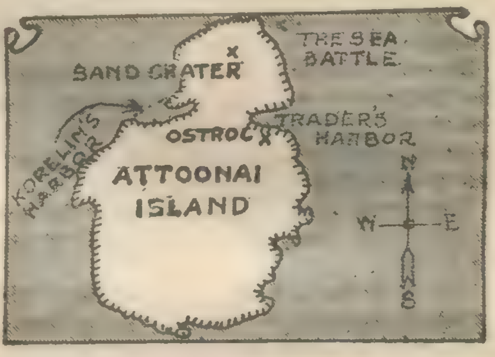
Without waiting for argument he strode off, this time toward the eastern point of the headland.

When he had gone a few hundred steps through the sedge and prickly shrubs and was crouched on a sand dune spying ahead, he became aware of a man creeping upon him from behind. Whirling he saw his rogue.

"Wherever we are going there is a chance of food and water," the Admiral began, wheedling, "but none back yonder in that sand hole. Besides—"

The captain's face clouded momentarily with anger, but the anger faded.

"Yes, besides. That word saves you from a kicking, rogue. As much as for food and drink, you came to be with your master. Come along then, and for once be discreet."



They kept to thickets and sand gullies and bellied across the open plots of sedge. By noon they had made their cautious way to the east cape and lay hidden securely in a clump of devil's club.

Usually from that point native kayaks set out across the Straits northeast to another island and so to the mainland. During the afternoon several parties of Attoonaians came and went. Korelin shook his head.

"Those who dare to appear openly are friends or slaves of the murderers. We must catch one who is skulking like ourselves."

The afternoon wore away and the expedition looked a failure. But at dusk the Admiral swore one of his pot-oaths, tore his glass from a pocket and began twirling it at a willow thicket seven hundred yards up the shore.

"A man!" he announced. "Skulking like ourselves and engaged in a task of doing something."

"Your fool's luck again, rogue," muttered his master. "You have earned your food and drink today."

By circling inland they came upon the thicket quietly and unseen. They rose together, leaped at the Aleut and mastered him after a brief struggle.

He had a bundle of sealskins, sticks and whalebone which he was fashioning into a kayak. For his solitary voyage he had brought along a bear-gut of water and some fish.

"Look at me," bade Korelin, holding him by a wrist. "I remember your face. Did you not once dive down the side of my ship and try to pull out the nails with your teeth? I gave you nails and a kicking."

Recognition spread over the Aleut's face, and his fright left him when he knew his captor.

He was Tlewah, one of Kadu's hunters who had not submitted to the traders. He had meant to escape to the mainland. He knew where the *tyone* was hiding, and promised to bring him to the rendezvous.

They asked him for his water and fish, and started back through the twilight to the sand crater.

"He may be a treacherous traitor," the Admiral suggested. "He may bring Gerassim Berg to murder us and cut our throats."

"I had thought of that possibility. We will watch the sand pit from a safe distance and see who appears. But stop twisting off those fish-tails and eating them, glutton."

Tlewah was true, however, to his promise and trust. The next evening the captain, hiding alone near the sand crater, saw Kadu appear, bringing water, seal beef and news. The other four men came at the signal.

Urey Zakhar and seventeen Cossacks from the sunken sloop had been picked up by the boats. The traders had searched the landwash for tracks, and finding no signs, had concluded that none of the *Diomede's* company had survived. They thought their victory clean-cut, their enemy killed to the last man.

"So much the better," observed the young captain.

"For what, Ion Korelin?" asked Prior Ioassof.

"My plans."

"Yea, unwatched we can escape easier," the prior said innocently. "Mayhap Kadu can take us south in a *bidarra* from island to island until we are within striking distance of Attoo."

"*Escape?*" Korelin echoed.

* * *

HE UTTERED only the one word, but it was fraught with passion.

"What?" asked the prior wondering. "What do ye propose to do, Ion Korelin?"

"That, holy friend, is a question. We are whipped, it seems, but not beaten."

"When, then, is a man beaten?"

"A coward, before he is born. A man, not until he is dead."

"With a staunch ship and a stalwart crew ye could not prevail against them. Now having lost ship and crew ye have—"

"The more reason for revenge, holy friend. My Russians gave up their lives willingly, but at my bidding nevertheless. Now shall I, alive still through the mercy of Providence, take thought of escape? Of saving my own life? It would be shame upon me to the grave and into the afterward."

"Have ye forgotten Elena Nadayof? If we escape she can escape with us."

The good prior thought his appeal was an adroit and powerful argument.

"Have you forgotten the scores of Attoonaians wantonly slaughtered?" Korelin returned. "Her life, however precious, is one life."

"Nothing ye can do under the blue of heaven can whip them."

"I have given you my notion about victory. However, this time we will try the dark of night."

The prior gave up his useless argument. The captain spoke with Kadu.

"How many warriors can you muster?"

"Eighty."

"Then send out word to them tomorrow to be ready for your call. Say nothing about us white men, for a traitor in your band would mean our quick death. Return here tomorrow night. You and I have an errand then."

Kadu agreed and departed. Half sick with fever and his wound and three sleepless nights, Korelin slept around the clock, waking only when the Admiral roused him to eat and drink. After dark Kadu slipped into the hiding again.

"Our errand, brother?"

The captain took him by the arm.

"Come."

And to the others—

"We shall be back before morning."

Under a bright moon they made their way to the north headland, and stopped when the waves lapped just ahead of them.

"Can you swim sturdily, Kadu?"

"I swam a day and a night once when a bull walrus resented my spear thrust."

"That is good. We are going to swim out to the wreck of the *Diomede*."

"A kayak—" the *tyone* started to suggest.

"Could be seen two bow shots away under this moon, if anybody is aboard the brigantine. A swimmer can not."

They doffed their clothes, stuck up a peeled willow wand, and waded into the tide. In an hour's easy swimming they saw the dark hulking form of the *Diomede*. They approached cautiously. No lights nor sounds. They boarded, and found her lonely as a tomb.

But she had been visited. The bodies had been tossed overboard, falconets and the six guns were gone, the whole brigantine, above and below, had been completely stripped of weapons, stores and ammunition.

"The thieves were ahead of us, Kadu. My hope to have proper weapons was idle. But our plans shall go through, despite. While we rest a moment, let me speak what is in my mind to do.

"Gerassim Berg's sloop is at anchor again in the harbor. She will be guarded, but only lightly, for they think me dead. Surprize will be our most powerful ally. With your eighty men and my four we will attack the sloop. If we capture her, we will not even have to turn her guns upon the *ostrog*. A mere threat of marooning will bring the surrender of those ashore."

The *tyone* caught his breath sharply at the boldness of the plan. For several minutes he said nothing. Then solemnly:

"It is a warrior's venture. With all my power I shall aid."

Back ashore, while they were clothing themselves, Kadu told a tale which set his listener to thinking deeply.

When he, Kadu, was held captive by the free traders, Elena Nadayof befriended him. On two occasions she pleaded with Gerassim Berg and saved his life. Then when the traders made up their minds to kill him as a lurking, constant danger, she connived to help him escape. Since then she had kept up a secret communication with him and warned him of the man-hunts.

Her motives and purpose the Aleut could not guess.

Ion Korelin saw, or thought he saw, through her motive. If she actually was playing the traders one against the other, as Prior Ioassof surmised, her desperate game must come to an *impasse* some time. When that time came she must either submit or flee. Did she mean to flee to Kadu, to trust herself to his protection, to have him take her south down the Archipelago toward Attoo?

If that were her purpose, then surely she would be an ally in this kayak venture against the sloop.

THIS reasoning grew to a conviction, as they hurried back to the sand crater. He instructed Kadu to communicate with her, to hint about an attack, and to find out where she stood. If she were an enemy of the traders, then he was to broach the plan cautiously, to tell her about the *Diomede* survivors and to ask her aid in as far as she could give it without imperiling herself.

Kadu was absent two whole days. Not a word did they hear from him and Korelin began to get alarmed. But on the third afternoon the Aleut *tyone* slipped into the rendezvous, and his report of the swift work he had done explained his long absence.

All preparations for the attack had been finished. Grass ladders for boarding had been made, forty kayaks collected from far and near, eighty hunters to man them were in hiding and ready for their orders.

What was of chiefest importance, Elena Nadayof had promised her aid in the venture. She sent word to the young captain to come and speak personally with her that night.

An hour after dark Kadu brought him to the rendezvous, a sand cove four hundred paces west of the *ostrog*. The girl was already there awaiting them alone. The *tyone* thoughtfully paced guard on a little ridge overlooking the cove.

"How did you contrive to get outside the palisade?" asked Korelin after their handclasp of greeting.

"Four of my *promyshleniki* are guarding the north gate tonight."

"*Your promyshleniki?*"

"Those from the *Hipolite*. I call them mine, for they, like my father and me, were impressed into their present service, and seem to acknowledge me still their leader. But I must go back in a few moments, Ion Korelin, or my absence will be questioned."

"Then let us to planning. Kadu has told you our intentions. You have suggestions, Elena Nadayof?"

"Yes. I wanted to talk of them personally with you and, may I confess, to see with my own eyes that you had escaped the sea battle. I scarcely could believe Kadu. Here is information, Ion Korelin, which I obtained from Gerassim Berg.

"The sloop has forty men aboard, and at night ten of these pace deck as a guard. Your eighty Aleuts cannot hope to win the vessel from that number. If you will give me time and will attack when I send word, I shall do these things, or try to achieve them:

"First, I shall see that Gerassim Berg is ashore that night. On some pretext or other, a festivity or merry-making, I shall have him at the *ostrog*. His leadership against your assault would count heavily. Leaderless, the crew would be more easily beaten. Besides him, I shall see if I cannot draw a good number of the crew ashore, perhaps for this same *prosnic*, festivity.

"And then, I shall strive to have my twelve *promyshleniki* on board that night, perhaps to take the places of those others who come ashore. A couple of them, their leaders whom I can rely upon, I shall take into my confidence and instruct them that after your surprise is sprung, they shall seize weapons and aid you. More than this, Ion Korelin, I cannot do without arousing suspicion."

"By the heavens, it is enough!" Korelin exclaimed, marveling at the girl's swift and shrewd plans. "What was sheer madness before now has fair hope of success."

"I must go. I shall send word by messenger to Kadu what time the attack is to be made. Until your victory, Ion Korelin—"

She held out her hand. The young captain bowed and kissed it. He would have taken her safely to the palisade, but she forbade him and slipped into the darkness.

All the way back to the sand crater he kept marveling at her ability to plan, at her quick wittedness, at her power over her *promyshleniki* and her influence over Gerassim Berg. Yet, in a way, he scarcely wondered at this influence, for he had allowed himself to be swayed to her plans without a word of dissent. At their first meeting he had read her merely as a girl of unusual beauty and appeal, sea-wrecked in a far-away spot and set down amid peril. Now he read more into her character, courage strange to find in a woman and a shrewdness that was still stranger. She was enigmatic, elusive, a puzzle.

When he reached the sand cove at midnight, he briefly retold Prior Ioassof what the plans were.

"By the ten thousand saints!" he concluded, more to himself than to a listener. "There is a girl! I thought them all to be full of nonsense and feminine trickery, and a pitfall to the foot of a man."

"So saith the Writ," the prior answered. "And I interpret it that she shall be a pitfall unto the feet of Gerassim Berg and Urey Zakhar. It striketh me from thy sigh at her name, Ion Korelin, that when this venture is finished mayhap I shall have another duty than with lancet or prayer book."

"This venture is not completely finished," put in the Admiral, who had edged into the conversation. "As a soft answer turneth away wrath, so doth a pair of brown eyes, especially if they be in the dark and can not be seen, turn away a man's head and his suspicions. I have known wenches and wenches, and never yet have I known a wench who was not two-faced as day and night. If we pin faith to her we may all be murdered and our throats cut. This plan does not have my approval. Let us escape."

By a quick scurry on all fours the rogue did.

The words of a fool are sometimes full of wisdom.

TWO days later Elena Nadayof sent instructions to Kadu that the attack should be made the next night at one o'clock. The *tyone* relayed the word to Korelin by messenger, for he himself was busy breaking the plan to his lieutenants and making his final preparations.

When the moon sank at midnight of the next night, four score Aleuts and five white men crept out of the willows on the north side of the harborage. Forty-odd kayaks were strung along the water edge. Korelin and the *tyone* gave their last orders and made final disposition of their men.

Hope of success hung largely upon taking the Cossacks aboard the sloop by surprize. Surprize depended upon getting a couple men aboard her secretly and, as it were, throwing open the gates to their confederates. Ion Korelin and Kadu chose to slip ahead of the fleet and take this perilous task upon themselves.

Lyov Vassiutkinski and Tlewah were to be in personal command of the fleet and lead the boarding charge. An Aleut called Ouk, who had for a time hunted for the traders but now had come back to Kadu, was to take two kayaks upon the west side of the sloop and set up a yelling, when the fight started, to divert a part of the Cossacks.

When the last orders had been given, the *tyone* called his followers close around him. With arms upraised and voice breaking, he exhorted them to courage. The white men listened, marveling. They had never before heard a speech more inspiriting from the lips of a man. There was good need of it. The Aleuts were hunters rather than warriors, faithful and dependable at spearing seal, and brave enough at venturing far to sea in their air-blown kayaks, but of questionable courage and worth in a hand-to-hand battle.

When the natives started setting their boats to water, the young captain took Prior Ioassof aside.

"The work which will be done yonder on the water within an hour is work which does not befit your garb, holy friend. Your duty lies not in sending the souls of men to hell, but to heaven. Therefore—make no protest, I know your courage—you must stay behind. Whatever outcome, your services will be needed.

"If our venture and our vengeance carry, then there will be limbs to mend and heads to patch. If we fail and are swept into death, then only your voice and priestly power will stand between Elena Nadayof and the sinful purpose of these free traders. Your garb is your safety. Red-handed as they are, they will not dare harm you. Your blessing now and I must go."

Prior Ioassof gave it.

The attacking party was quickly under way.

Hugging the shore closely, it moved a verst east, in order to come upon the vessel from the seaward side. An attack would be least expected from that direction. The forty-odd kayaks kept close together, paddles almost knocking, until they swung out into the center of the bay and headed back for the sloop.

Then the captain and Kadu in their kayak went three hundred paces in the lead. One hundred paces behind them followed two other kayaks with four of Kadu's picked men. The Aleut Ouk swung to the right in order to circle the sloop and come upon it from the landside. Lastly, out of sight on the dark water came the main body marshaled by Lyov Vassiutkinski and Tlewah.

At intervals Kadu passed back signals, the night calls of sleepy waterfowls. From the rear Tlewah answered. At times the fleet swerved a few rods out of its course to avoid scaring up banks of sea-ducks feeding in the eight fathoms. In this manner they came within sight of the sloop and sound of her creaking cordage.

Ion Korelin and Kadu, silent as shadows, gained the stern anchor chain. They shoved their craft back whence they came lest it should scrape against the vessel's side. Then they climbed up the linkage. From chainhole to rail was more than a man's reach, but standing on Kadu's shoulder, Korelin drew himself up and his confederate after him. They slipped to the deck and peered around them.

They saw not a soul, not even a sentry. They heard nothing except the tide-lap against the bows and the gentle flap of a canvas not well reefed.

The main fleet was still out of sight, but the two kayaks had reached the anchor chain and were awaiting orders. At Kadu's signal they moved into the vessel's shadow and stood directly beneath. A line was dropped to them. Four ladders were pulled up and fastened. Six men now were aboard the sloop.

Still there was no sound nor move nor whisper of alarm from the Cossacks.

Ion Korelin, sword drawn, was tensed for the quick, hot work to follow. He could hear Kadu's heart hammering. Fortune was abetting them beyond their hopes. The odds of their desperate gamble seemed strongly in their favor. Barring a trick of luck, their victory was a matter of two or three brief minutes.

The kayak fleet came now into sight dimly like a mottle of shadows on the water. It stopped and awaited the prearranged sign. Kadu's signal sounded like the mew of a night bird suddenly affrighted by the sloop. The fleet came on, massed, growing clearer and clearer against the water till it was only a ship-length away.

Down in deck center at the rail, the captain caught a glow as of a shielded brand. Breath bated, he watched and saw another. And then, more by instinct than by his faculties, he suddenly sensed that the amidships deck was thick with men. His ears seemed to catch hoarsely whispered orders, and the heavy breathing of two-score *promyshleniki*.

A cold fear smote him. The attack had been *awaited*.

All hope hung upon a second. If only the Aleuts could get aboard with their spears, the sloop might yet be taken. Korelin sprang to his feet and shouted. Gripping his sword he hurled himself down the deck. Kadu yelled at his men, and leaped after him. The four Aleuts followed.

Pandemonium broke in a twinkling aboard the vessel. From musketry, falconets and guns amidships a solid sheet of fire burst along the rail. Below from the smitten fleet echoed a cry of rage and terror.

The captain and his five men ran into a knot of Cossacks who rose from the deck to meet them. Two of the Aleuts fell from pistol balls, and the arm of a third was cloven off by a saber slash even as he speared the Cossack who swung at him. The three survivors were hurtled backward toward the stern, fighting terrific odds desperately to shield the ladders for that second necessary for the Aleuts to get aboard.

The sheet of fire along the rail cut lanes through the kayak fleet at a range so close that the fragile boats were knocked bodily out of the water. A handful of the braver hunters led by Tlewah and Lyov Vassiutkinski dashed through the death rain and swarmed up the ladders. They were met by a dozen Cossacks who by sheer weight of numbers had brushed Korelin and the *tyone* aside. The struggle at the ladders was hot and bloody, but hopeless for the assailants.

They were knocked back into the water, shot and thrust through and beaten down by heavy odds. Mate Lyov fought like five men, slashing and stabbing with a cutlass which he had snatched from a Cossack he had speared. But his valor was futile. He fought almost alone. He would have died fighting, struggling to board, had not a saber slash cut the ladder he clung to and precipitated him to the water below. That portion of the kayak fleet which had escaped the massacre of the waiting guns, scattered and scurried into the merciful shelter of the dark.

On deck Korelin and the *tyone* fought alone now. The fourth Aleut had fallen to a pistol. Above the outcry of battle, they heard a repeated order in the walrus voice of Gerassim Berg.

"Prisoners of those two alive!"

When the *promyshleniki* astern had beaten down the last of the assailants and cut the ladders, they turned and hemmed in the two men from behind.

"This fight is lost!" Korelin hissed. "Escape!"

Kadu was even then being overwhelmed and crushed. Korelin freed him by a savage single-handed onslaught. Kadu feinted to the right, whirled like a lithe flash to his left, wriggled through a fence of *promyshleniki*, and arched his body in a high leap over the rail.

But the captain had lost his chance at escape. He was borne down by the weight of a dozen bodies atop him. His sword was wrenched from his grasp, his arms and legs were pinioned.

Bound hand and foot, he was dragged down the deck to face his captors.

Urey Zakhar, bandaged and an arm in sling from the sea fight, spat in his face with a foul epithet. Berg laughed and struck him with a fist.

"Take him to the cell we made ready for him," Zakhar ordered. "Send *promyshleniki* after his cohorts. We have lesser spars to drape. Now guard him heavily until daylight. Our spectacle with the Bering Wolf must be seen!"

WHEN Ion Korelin was thrust into a dark hole below deck, with the certainty of death no farther away than the dawn, he tried to compose his thoughts and be ready to meet his call courageously. But his brain would not be quiet. Foiled vengeance and hatred boiled too strongly within him. He was tortured not so much by his own approaching end as by the mystery of why the venture had failed.

From Zakhar's words and from the ambush aboard the sloop, it was clear to him that the traders had been warned by some one who knew the plans to the last detail. The trap they laid was a clever trap. They had allowed the six men to board, and held their fire till half the fleet could be destroyed at one blast. How had they known? By whom warned?

The short hours until dawn were an eternity. Dawn came. He knew the hour from the morning breeze and the calling of birds. He got stern grip on himself and addressed a prayer to his Maker. Then more calmly he waited for the footsteps outside his cell.

A full hour dragged by, and yet the footsteps tarried. Another hour, and the guards outside were changed. That meant no quick and merciful prospect of the end. Were Gerassim Berg and Urey Zakhar waiting until the man-hunt should bring in the others whom they sought for the lesser spars?

The heat of noon passed. The tide turned. Sea-birds homing for their island rookeries flackered low over the ship. A chill grew again in the dark prison.

His door, flinging suddenly open, awakened him from a feverish dozing. He sat up. It was only a Cossack with a candle, a pint of wine and a meal of bread. He loosened the prisoner's hands, bade him eat and manacled him again. Korelin asked the Cossack nothing; the latter vouchsafed as little.

Dawn came again, with its calling of birds. A heavy trampling on deck awoke him to another day. He heard unusual sounds about the ship—sharp orders which came to him muffled and indistinguishable, the loud flapping of a loosened sheet, a bustle and a stir from bows to stern. Food was brought to him again. Shortly afterward he roused at the sound of footsteps in the passageway.

He thought the bustle on deck was preparation for the spectacle, and the footsteps, his summons.

Instead, the door was flung open, a figure thrust inside and the door barred heavily again.

"Kadu? Lyov?" he asked sharply.

"Nay," groaned a voice. "I am none of your helpers and abettors in this foolish venture, but your fool and rogue who counseled you better!"

"Nickolai Bubn! What are you doing here?"

"Bound hand and foot like yourself, and fearing rats!"

"Kadu, and Lyov Vassiutkinski, and Sidor, and Prior Ioassof and our other allies?"

"Softly, master. My teeth are loose and my jaw is wobbly from the fist of that red-haired bear, Gerassim Berg. As for Sidor Savelief he is as dead as twenty musket balls could make him, and in heaven by now or else in hell. As for the *tyone*, he is either dead or has turned mole and burrowed somewhere in Attoonai sand so deeply that he cannot be found. As for Lyov Vassiutkinski, your able *morekhod*, he is alive and bound handsomely, a prisoner at the *ostrog*. This company is short-handed on mariners who are mariners, and Lyov has promised a change of heart and of masters."

"Lyov, my mate, turned coward and traitor? You are lying, rogue, or else guessing."

"I am not lying, master, but telling the truth. Nor guessing. I have seen and heard all that happened. Nobody minded me much. That is one advantage of being a—being thought a fool. Lyov Vassiutkinski is going to enter the services of Gerassim Berg and Urey Zakhar, and I look for his speedy promotion. If you think his treachery and cowardice strange, then hold your ears wide open, for I've things stranger to tell—all in good time.

"As for Prior Ioassof, he is tolerated not so much because he is a man of God as because he is a medicus. Scurvy is rank among the Cossacks, and we dealt some plentiful wounds in the sea battle. As for myself, whom you did not inquire about, I chose your company and the fear of rats, to being a slave at the *ostrog* and possibly getting knocked on the head, as was contemplated at first.

"As for yourself, whom also you did not inquire about—that is a long story. I will have to back up a ways to give it all. My jaw feels broken, so I will make the telling short.

"I was in the middle of the kayak fleet when that first greeting blew half of us out of the water into eternity. I was among the other half. I tried to lash the Aleuts around me to courage and to follow Lyov Vassiutkinski aboard the sloop. But lashing and oaths did not move them to face those guns. They are a cowardly lot. They fled for the shore, and I was dragged with them. Eventually Lyov and Sidor came swimming to the beach. The three of us, with Prior Ioassof, tried to find hiding, but we were caught at the first daylight. Sidor, whose gunnery they still remembered, was shot down. Lyov for his marinership, the prior for his physic and holy garb, and I for heaven knows what reason, were taken to the *ostrog*.

"The traders were there to see which of their assailants would be brought in for the lesser spars. Being thought a senseless fool—and I took good care to look and act like one—I saw and heard everything.

"There was common accord between Zakhar and Berg that you should have the highest spar. They had set their hearts on that, and in half an hour you would have been a dead man. But this wench—"

"Speak decently of Elena Nadayof, rogue!" Korelin ordered.

"THIS wench," the Admiral went on, secure in their mutual bondage, "spoke soft and winsome words with Berg, while Zakhar was arranging for your demise.

"She and Berg conferred in the hallway, while I listened from the kitchen. There was sound reason in what she said, but it was not mere reason which influenced that bear. You have seen her, master, and maybe have been swayed by her wenchly wiles yourself.

She said you were known and powerfully befriended along the whole Kamchatka Coast where your services against the Chukchi were still remembered. You have friends at Attoo, friends everywhere. If the traders hanged you from a spar, they would have to keep to the high seas thereafter, for your Petropavlovsk fellow captains would even bowl down to Okhotsk and call for an accounting with guns and swords.

"Said Berg—'Shall we turn the Wolf loose then and invite him to attack us again?'

" 'There is a way to dispose of him for good and all, yet shield yourselves,' said she. 'And it is infinitely more satisfying a disposal than to give him a quick death from a spar.'

"She told him what that way was. I heard it and you will hear it. All in good time. We have plenty of time before us, if not much else.

"Gerassim Berg was half pleased with the plan at the start, and by dint of wenchly wiles and promises of her favor, she speedily won him to her way of thinking and made him wholly pleased with her scheme.

"Urey Zakhar came in about then to announce that the spectacle was ready for the chief act. Berg told him of the new and better plan. Zakhar differed. The debate then, master, was between the Bear and the Fox, and it was hot.

" 'Who lost his ship to a six-gun brigantine?' thundered the Bear.

" 'Who schemed and got a copy of the Bering Wolf's charts, and laid the plans to come to Attoonai?' barked the Fox.

" 'Who led all the fighting after we got here?' thundered the Bear.

" 'Who planned all those fights so well that we won them?' barked the Fox.

"It was *bang-bang* and *bing-bing* like that, master, for half an hour. They recounted each other's personal history, and it would have made your ears tingle to hear the details of that. They each swore that he deserved all the furs, and everything else desirable and held in common between them. I looked for skulls to be crushed and the world rid of one murderer at least. But Zakhar was wearing his pistols openly and Berg was afraid of them. And Berg carried a sword as long as his leg and Zakhar was afraid of that. So the storm died away in grumbles and growls. Said Zakhar:

" 'We must not quarrel, Gerassim Berg, but cleave together. There is still work to be done here, and there is still danger of attack from the Mainlanders and from the Aleuts, while Kadu escapes the man-hunts searching for him.'

"So they made peace again, and commenced to talk about your fitness for the highest spar. Zakhar believed you should grace it. He was gradually winning his point, when this wench again—"

"I shall cut your scurrilous tongue out!" the young captain promised hotly. And for the first time he meant his words.

"This wench again repeated her arguments, and paraded her wiles and hints of favor. Not to let Berg get ahead of him in that matter, Zakhar finally fell in with her way of thinking.

"Upon hearing this, master, I was ebullient physically, instead of rejoicing within my carcass. And because I danced, I was kicked into another room. But by dint of straining my ear, I heard the last of what was said. Heard it clearly, master, understand that.

" 'But why,' queried the Fox, 'why are you so zealous of this Ion Korelin's life, my darling?'

" 'Your darling?' growled the Bear. 'Take better care of your words, Urey Zakhar!'

" 'I am not zealous of the Bering Wolf's life,' the wench replied to Zakhar. 'I am zealous only of your future safety. If you hang him on board your vessel, it will work us irreparable harm. Your injury is my injury. Else why would I have wormed the details of this attack from him and Kadu and warned you about it?"

The Admiral bit off his narrative suddenly. A cry that seemed to rend Ion Korelin's breast broke from his lips. For a moment a sob choked his speech.

"Nickolai Bubn, by the sincere oath of God's blood, if you lie—"

"Master," the rogue said soberly and honestly, "I do not lie. I heard those words from her lips. By my ten faithful years with you, I swear I heard her say them."

For several minutes in the dark cell there was no further sound than the fraught breathing of a man stricken by worse than a bullet or a blade.

Then the Admiral spoke again.

"So the upshot of her wiles, master, is that we will be put ashore, in these far-distant and lonely waters, upon some tiny and the-barer-the-better island or reef, where we will be good and sure to perish speedily. If the traders thereafter are accused of your death, they can speak of shipwreck and lead the accusers to your bones in proof.

"That falls in exactly with her scheme. I heard Prior Ioassof and you mention her desperate game of playing Gerassim Berg and Urey Zakhar against each other. So she does play them. When they quarrel and fight, the survivor will have the island, the sloop and all the furs to himself. Which one of them survives, she will take. She does not want him to be hanged speedily for your murder. If she befriended you that day when we visited the *ostrog*, it was merely because she did not know which way luck would fall out, and she wanted to be safe whatever happened."

III

THREE mornings later Ion Korelin and the Admiral were led blindfolded from their cell, thrust into a *bidarra* and rowed ashore.

They were left bound, but their bonds were adjusted so that they could free each other. When they finally achieved this and removed their blindfolds, the sloop was already half-hull down and rapidly spanking out of sight.

Beside them on the sand were two musket balls, two crackers, a jug of water and the Wolf emblem of the *Diomede*.

"Dead men's bones all look alike and the same," the Admiral philosophized. "But this flag will prove who we were."

His master did not assent to the doleful prophecy.

"We are indeed marooned, rogue," said he with a wry smile. But not yet dead. Bid your blue devil get behind you."

Korelin had recovered, in those three days, from the despair of a second defeat, and had put out of mind the blow of a certain treachery. He was his former self again, defiant and indomitable, only a little embittered, a little more grim.

Promptly the Admiral sat down and ate his cracker. Breakfast had been denied them that morning. Korelin looked about him to learn just what fate they had been left to.

The little island was as lonely as the middle of the ocean. No other shore was visible to any point of the compass. A tiny chance dot of land in a world of gray waters.

It was two versts long and half as wide and roughly rectangular. Its center ridge rose perhaps to seventy feet, just enough to insure that storm-tide could not sweep entirely over it. A wide, bare sand beach hemmed it around, but the ridge slopes were scantily clothed with clumps of grasses, sedge and small, stunted shrubs.

There were no rock ledges for sea-bird rookeries, no soil to grow edible roots, no food nor drink nor shelter. Merely a few acres of bleached sand, brown grasses and a wave-lapped shore. The purpose of the traders—his death by their designing, yet not actually by their hands—looked certain and speedy of realization.

"We had better been murdered outright and our throats cut," the Admiral groaned.

"Come," his master bade. "Leave off drinking from that jug. When it is gone we have only the ocean to drink from. Before we sit down and bemoan ourselves to death, let us pace around this island and see what we can see."

They started around the landwash. The Admiral kept his eyes on his master's heels, refusing to be hopeful. But Korelin looked about him curiously at the breakers, the beach and the island slope. There was little to see which they had not seen at the spot where they were put ashore.

On the east beach was a single small inlet, three fathoms deep, thrust into the landwash like an arrowhead. In its water floated a garden of sea-otter's cabbage, or long, snaky algæ. On the northeast beach, back almost to where they had started, the sand was coated thinly with a smear of white mud. Beyond those two things the island was sand, sedge and barrenness.

They came back to the jug of water again. While his master was busy with his thoughts the Admiral fought a secret battle with himself. He lost, and ate the second cracker.

Korelin finished his thinking in half an hour, and rose.

"Our first need is water, rogue. Food we can do without for a couple of days, if need be. Halfway down this west beach is a scattering of big seashells. Go and fetch several of the largest."

When the Admiral had gone, Korelin walked back from the water's edge toward the slope, and examined the ground thoughtfully. He knew the island received an extreme of rainfall. Its substratum was therefore bound to hold fresh water. The choice of where to dig however was hard to make. Near the beach, water would be struck at a shallow depth, but it would likely be impregnated with salt and undrinkable. The farther inland, the fresher the water would be. But with only shells to dig with, he could not hope to reach water along the slope.

He had selected a compromise spot where the first clump of sedge grew at the slope bottom, and was marking a circle with his foot, when he was startled by a loud shout. What now had the rogue stumbled upon?

Turning to look, he saw the Admiral running toward him at full speed. A hundred paces behind and rapidly gaining, loped a full-grown, white bear.

For a moment the young captain was paralyzed. They had no single weapon for defense, no tree to climb, no escape. Retreat into the water, the bear's own element, would only put them more helplessly at its mercy.

He got hold on his jumping nerves and went forward to meet the Admiral, neither hasty nor hesitant, but at a firm brisk walk. He put his fingers to his mouth and whistled. It was a long-drawn, sharp and vibrant noise that seemed fairly to split the air. A jarring, defiant, ear-piercing sound. It stopped the bear dead-short as would a musket ball just as the Admiral reached his master, stumbled and sprawled upon the sand.

"Get up!" Korelin ordered sharply, keeping his gaze upon the bear. "He is stopped only for a trice. Get up and make a bold appearance."

The gaunt bear sat on its haunches thirty steps away, blowing and sniffing. It dropped to all fours, lumbered several steps closer, and reared up again. Curiosity halted him, not fear, for the white bear is a cold-brained brute that does not know the fear of man. And his curiosity gave the signs of being quickly appeased.

"God help us!" the Admiral groaned, clutching his master's arm. "The monster is coming for us!"

"Nay, we must help ourselves," Korelin answered, himself white with fear. "By shouting and whistling we may hold him off a few moments longer. Have you that eye bauble still?"

The Admiral frantically searched his pockets and produced the tiny telescope.

"Walk backward," Korelin ordered, "toward the slope. Slowly. Show no sign of fear."

He took out the front lens as he backed, shouting and whistling, for the slope. The bear trundled after them. The first grass-plot was fifty steps away. Or a thousand leagues. But they reached it. Korelin knelt, gathered a handful of grass, and upon it focused the hot bead. A tiny wisp of smoke curled up. A glint of fire broke! He fed it single blades. It grew. As he reached for another handful, out of the corner of his eye he saw the bear heave up ten steps away and peer at the new strange phenomenon.

The fire spread and rose higher. The bear, suddenly affrighted, backed off whining. The Admiral came to life and gathered grass and shrub-stems furiously.

"This flame must never go out!" Korelin ordered. "Gather all the twigs and grass that you can, and heap up a pile. This flame, remember, is nothing less than our very lives!"

From a look at the Admiral's face, he knew his orders would for once be obeyed to the letter.

ABOUT mid-afternoon the bear left them for a dip in the breakers and a dinner of fish and sea-floor grass. They secured the water-jug and moved their fire to the spot where they meant to dig. The Admiral went after the shells which he had scattered along the landwash, while Korelin gathered enough grass and twigs to last a full day. Then they set to work in steady earnest. The water supply had dwindled to a quart, and they were feverish with thirst.

By nightfall when the bear returned, they were down four feet in the soft sand. A foot farther they struck soil perceptibly damp. Encouraged at this they labored on by the dim light of their protecting fire. By midnight they were down farther than a man's height, and the earth at bottom of their cup-shaped pit was oozy. From then until morning they slept by turns, for the light dry fuel had constantly to be renewed.

In the morning the pit bottom was covered with several inches of dirty water, only slightly salt.

With the problem of water solved, Korelin began to turn his mind to the question of food. He had an idea where to search, but while they were stalked by the white bear, it was impossible to stir a dozen steps from the fire. The brute was an added tribulation to their already hard fight to live. More than a tribulation, he was a growing menace. For the present the fire kept him off.

He circled it, thirty steps away, whining and sniffing. The chill of morning made him hungry. Several times he crawled up close, for all the world like a shaggy fawning dog, and several times he was driven back only by a heaped-up fire. His terror of it plainly was growing less. If he should return hungry and morose from a hunt, would the puny flame stop him?

They could do nothing that morning while he sulked around them. But when the heat of day set in, he lumbered off to the water. Swimming and diving with incredible ease and gracefulness, he went out a thousand yards to what was evidently a fish bank or a submarine garden. They saw him begin feeding.

"Walk up this slope and watch him, Bubn," Korelin bade. "Do not take your eyes from him for one small second. When he starts to return, call me. I am going after food."

The last word made the Admiral's eyes grow big with wonder and still bigger with anticipation. He promised to watch faithfully.

At a swift run the captain hurried across the north beach to the curious little shingle of white deposit. He waded into the water and between waves began to probe under the coating of mud. He found providentially what he expected—small beds of shellfish of a dozen shapes and varieties.

Gathering pockets and sea-cap full, he splashed to the sand, emptied them, and returned, working swiftly thus till he had gathered half a bushel. Then on the beach he sorted them, throwing back all but a few dozen small bivalves. A warning shout, rather a flurry of shouts, from the Admiral, sent him running back to the fire with the remainder. The bear was returning over the breakers.

"There is food, rogue," he remarked, with a hint of perhaps pardonable pride in his voice. "Good food, and there is more where I got these."

The Admiral required no urging.

"We must keep that brute from getting hungry, master," he suggested, opening shells. "We must if necessary feed him to keep him from feeding on us. We could gather these mollusks for him."

"So I have already decided to do, rogue. I shall gather him a bushel at the first opportunity, for his terror of the fire is getting slim, and I think that unless we can do something, tomorrow will be our last day on earth."

On the bivalves they made a hearty meal, and afterwards Ion Korelin sat on the sand and apostrophized the enemy, twenty paces away.

"Whether you came down by ice floe or were lost when you went swimming to sea and were storm-tossed here, I do not know, ugly brother. But I do know that where you came from, in colder and greener waters, certain things do not thrive or even exist.

"You therefore know nothing about them

from experience, and it mayhap that your brute instinct also will fail you in regard to them. We shall see, we shall see.

"Had you elected to live amiably here with us, as beings should in these lonely wastes, then all would have been peace between us. We would have suffered you to drink from the pit we digged, and you would have taught us many things about securing food. But like some of your human prototypes, you know not what friendliness means. You know no law of man nor God, no law save your own brute appetites. And those appetites, ugly brother, may bring you the death you deserve."

Toward evening the bear started out for his feeding grounds again.

"Did you see his boldness, rogue? He dares now within ten paces of the fire. Tomorrow morning, unless we forestall him—come. Our seconds are precious."

They hastened down to the white mud flat again. Korelin selected a certain large, smooth-shelled and spotted bivalve that was more numerous than any of the other varieties. By making sacks of their coats, they carried more than half a bushel back to the fire.

"You must stay here now and give me warning. I am going for a second load. On no account, as you value your life, touch one of these mollusks. They are all for the white bear."

He hurried to the mud shingle again and started back with a big load. Approaching camp he could see nothing of his servant. With a fear at his heart that the bear had come back hungry, he ran up.

Writhing in pain, the Admiral was lying on the sand beside the water-pit.

"You rascally, gluttonous *poloushka*, half-ear," his master blazed angrily when he saw the rogue had got only to the fourth bivalve and was in no danger. "You will not die as you deserve for neglecting your promised duty to gourmandize. Now thrust your finger far down your gullet, and the next time, obey my commands and not your belly."

The white bear returned late at twilight. He had fished several hours without success, and in consequence he was in a vicious temper. Possibly the bright fire could have restrained him that night, but when morning should come and the frost tang had whetted his appetite, the two men would have been doomed.

The captain had prepared a feast for him, however—nearly a bushel of the mollusks. He had even thoughtfully opened them, and exposed the dainty, juicy tidbits on their half-shells. Hungry, thirsty and morose, the bear sniffed once or twice, then fell to bolting the feast. As he fed he kept glancing up at the men and growling.

The captain, smiling queerly, growled back at him.

That night, hugging an extra-bright fire, the castaways heard strange sounds down on the beach. A mighty thrashing along the land-wash, and occasionally a resounding plunge into the water. And the next morning when gray dawn broke, they saw their ferocious enemy lying on the sand, half within the lapping of gentle waves, stone-dead, and a carrion gull pecking at his eyes.

THOUGH pale and weak yet from his sickness, the Admiral rolled on the sand in a frenzy of joy, and even the young captain lost control of himself momentarily and danced about the brute's carcass.

"We are working up, master!" the rogue cried when he regained his speech. "When we were set ashore on this bare strip of sand, we had nothing but our bare hands and the peril of this brutish beast. Now we have food and water and safety. We may yet cheat Gerassim Berg and Urey Zakhar of our lives."

"We may yet cheat those murderers of their lives," Ion Korelin said half to himself. "But there is work for us to do. Stop pounding your head on the sand and come with me."

That morning they swam awhile on the breakers and then gathered a supply of shell-fish to last for several meals. The Admiral was religiously careful to let his master do the sorting. That afternoon, after hours of tedious hacking with chipped shells, they managed to skin their late enemy. His flesh would have been nauseous to them even if the poison had not made it dangerous, so they ate none of it. Korelin however carefully preserved the tendons, the paw-bones, the intestines and other parts of the bear. A host of plans were already in his head, and the island's resources were next to nothing.

The following day he began work on his first ideas, rather, he started in to see if it would work. After a shell-fish breakfast he and the Admiral went down the east beach to the tiny deep-water cove. A pod of hair-seal, thirty or forty, were disporting there. They took alarm, plunged into the tide, and disappeared while the men were still a hundred paces away.

"If we could only catch one, we would have seal-beef," the Admiral remarked, rubbing his stomach.

"We would have more than a mere something to appease your gullet, rogue. Seals are like faith. Having them, anything is possible. Now doff your clothes and busy yourself dragging sea-cabbage ashore. Some parts of it we will dry and burn for salt. For the rest I have other purposes."

Out of the wet mass he selected two long, rope-like hollow strands. From them he split off a dozen slender withes uniform in size and about six feet long. These were wrapped tightly together in a straight bundle and laid aside in the sun to dry and toughen.

The Admiral was full of questions.

"Now what, master," he kept inquiring, "are you intending to do with this?"

"To build a three-masted schooner, rogue. But before building the ship, I have to make the wood to build it with."

While the bundle of withes were hardening, a process of several days, the captain made a bird bolas, a weapon he had seen used by the Kamchatka natives. He ripped fifteen strings from the cloth of his coat and tied them together at one end. To the other, free-swinging ends he tied fifteen bits of shell and pebble. Hurled into a flock of birds, the bolas invariably entangled and brought one down. The Admiral became expert in its use. The shell-fish were no longer needed. He could bag a dozen surf birds in half a day's hunting. One foggy morning he even brought down a pair of emperor geese from a V flying low overhead.

Food they had now in plenty. A kind of shelter, too, dug in the hill slope, covered with a weave of grass and shrubs and carpeted with the bearskin.

And then one morning, as the Admiral came back to camp triumphantly with a brace of big sea-ducks, he was startled out of his wits by an arrow swishing past him and wisping into the sand. From behind a clump of shrubs his master rose up with a bow as tall as he.

It was a fantastic piece of work but, considering the materials and tools, it was little short of a miracle. Six of the tough dry withes had been scraped to a taper at each end, then bound tightly together and wrapped with bear gut, which was glued to the wood by a glue made from boiled neck-tissue of the bear. The bow in fact looked like a solid piece. It was strung with the thongs with which the two castaways had been bound on the morning of their landing. The thing was heavy, but in strength and suppleness it was actually superior to the ordinary Aleut bow made with the best of wood and implements.

The arrows, a counterpart of the bow, were tipped with paw-bones of the bear, and feathered with split-quills from the wings of the Admiral's geese. Against smaller beasts at a modest range the weapon would be quite effective.

"Master," said the Admiral after trying the bow and missing an object by a dozen paces, "we now have food aplenty; salt for it, even. We have water, safety, an abode, and now we have weapons. There is but one worry that bothers me?"

"What is the bother that worries you, rogue?"

"When do we sail away from this island?"

"On what?" the captain asked, innocently enough, but his question was a trap, for he read the scoundrel's mind.

"On the three-masted schooner you are going to build."

"If you will amend your idle ways, rogue, we shall sail in a month at most. Mayhap sooner!"

THE next morning before dawn Korelin took up bow and arrows and started around the west beach for the seal cove. The air hung thick with a rolling woolly fog. Even when day broke full, he could not see five paces ahead of him. But as he approached the inlet, he heard an occasional sigh or snort, and a splashing in the water. He strung the bow, fitted his best arrow and bellied toward the sounds.

Most of the pod were sporting in the water. Half a dozen, more sedate or else wearied of the frolic, had crawled ashore and were lying a few paces up on the sand, waiting for the sun to break through. Korelin came upon them suddenly. One good-sized *holluschickie*, bachelor, reared up its head, saw him and flipped a warning.

An arrow pierced entirely through the seal's throat, killing it almost without a quiver. Korelin leaped to his feet, sprang forward and shot two arrows into another. A sharp wrestle at the water edge, and he dragged the second seal back upon the sand.

That particular pod came back to that particular cove no more, but it was roving season for the young cows and bachelors, and other pods came. In two weeks time by assiduous hunting he killed twelve hair-seal. He dragged out and dried a quantity of the snaky kelp, boiled up more of the neck-tissue glue, and made a sizable amount of thread from sea-flax, a kind of algæ which, dipped in fresh water, can be drawn out to the size of cord and toughened then in the sun.

In another week, by patient labor, he accomplished what might be called a craft. It was hardly a three-masted schooner. A crazier-looking thing was never trusted with human freight.

Its ribs were made as the shooting-bow had been made, of kelp withes dried and toughened into shape. Over them the seal skins were spread tight, sewed together, and the seams glued on the inside. The flooring was a tough web of shrubbery with the scraped bearskin on top of it. Six substantial thwarts from gunwale to gunwale made the frame rigid, and obviated any danger of the ribs' caving in when the craft was loaded.

Five inflated seal-bladders tied under water on each side snubbed the boat's speed somewhat but increased its buoyancy wonderfully. A sail was patched up out of the unused portions of the skins. Paddles were made by the simple process of bringing together the ends of an eight-foot kelp, wrapping the handle down to within a foot of the end and stretching sealskin over this loop.

When the captain, with many misgivings, pronounced it ready for voyaging, they took it out across the breakers for a test.

It was lop-sided, obstinate and altogether a thing to laugh at. But it sat up on top the water, and carried two men with ease, and it rode the waves in a manner that made the young captain proud of his labor. They paddled two versts offshore, fastened the *Diomede's* emblem to the mainmast and sailed back to the cove triumphantly.

Lastly they laid in provisions of seal-beef, dried birds and five gallons of water in bear-gut bottles, and thus, six weeks after they were thrown ashore on a sandy reef to starve, they were ready to put to sea.

"There is one other worry that bothers me, master," the Admiral said the evening after the testing of the craft. "Where are we going, now that we can go? How do you know where the nearest land lies? How do you know there is a shore within five hundred versts beyond our reach? On several clear occasions I have gone up this slope and looked in every direction without seeing a shred or suspicion of land. I would rather stay here than drown at sea and starve and die of thirst."

"There is land to the north of us, rogue," Korelin informed him, as if reading from a chart. "But it is one hundred and thirty or forty versts distant. There is land to the south but it is still farther away. The nearest is to the east, eighty mayhap ninety versts from here."

The Admiral's eyes popped.

"How—" was all he could manage to splutter.

"You were born a dolt," said the master. "You looked for land with your eyes and that bauble instead of using your head as a man should. After all your hunting of birds here, have you noted nothing of their coming and going? In the evening when birds home for their rookeries, those that home east leave here a scant hour before twilight and fly low on the water. In the morning they arrive here first from the east, later from the north, two hours after sunrise from the south, and never at all from the west.

"Now will you cease grumbling and go to sea, or would you rather remain here and freeze to death this winter or, escaping that, be a dinner for the next bear that comes down with the packs?"

They put to sea three mornings later, with a steady mild wind driving them eastward.

ALL that day and night the wind held and the canoe was borne eastward. When morning broke, Ion Korelin stood up and looked ahead. He could see nothing but limitless gray water.

He spoke lightly of the prospect to the Admiral, but deeply within himself he was beset with doubts. The wind might stop at any hour and leave them tossing helplessly; or change and blow them back into the western waters whence no birds came. Staunch as it yet seemed, the canoe might suddenly turn unseaworthy. His calculations about the birds might be wrong in direction or distance or both, and even if they were right, a two-verst island could easily enough be missed in a hundred-verst voyage without compass or adequate means of steering.

During that second day they drifted on into the east. That evening Korelin, worn out with futile watching and misgivings, fell heavily asleep and slept in the tossing canoe through the whole night.

He was awakened in the morning by a shout from the Admiral. The rogue was standing wide-legged, twirling his glass frantically.

Five versts almost directly south an island reared up from the sea, an island several times larger than the one they had quitted. Its ridge-line, rising two or three hundred feet, was fringed with rookery cliffs, and its slopes were clothed with greenery.

After one good glance at it, the captain snatched down the sail, grasped a paddle and turned the canoe's head several points west of south.

"Unless you can swim from here to there, cease trying to dance, rogue, in this schooner of ours," he ordered. "And set to work with that paddle, for we are going to have a battle against our friend, the west wind, before we gain that island."

They labored without ceasing for four hours. The canoe was far better at drifting than at being driven. It persisted in every direction but the right one. By virtue of shrewd coaxing and steering and backbreaking work with the clumsy paddles, they kept it headed toward the fair prospect, and very gradually drew near. Had the island been sighted an hour later, they could never have made it. As it was, they landed at mid-afternoon.

"Your eyes see all things first," Ion Korelin remarked, after they had waded ashore with a shout that sent up wheeling clouds of birds. "If it is not a bear you stumble upon, it is an island that probably saves our lives."

They gathered eggs and shot four ducks and had a great meal on the spot where they had landed. Then they walked up the slope, scaled the cliff and reached the crest.

Low down in the east they espied an island still larger than the one they were on. With aid from the Admiral's glass they could see that it was heavily forested.

"Beyond must be the mainland, the *Bolshaia Zemlia,*" Korelin said softly. "My rogue, if your sinful soul has room for a prayer of thanks, offer it."

While they sat there on the crest the Admiral, after many false starts and much fidgeting, broke out with a story.

"Master, last night I saw a vision."

"From the quantity of seal-beef you ate and the stale water you drank, you should have seen something."

"Nay, a vision," the Admiral insisted soberly. "It came at midnight when you were sound asleep. I thought I heard voices on the water. They woke me from a doze. I looked, and in the moonlight I saw a *bidarra* manned by nine of the Aleuts who helped us attack the sloop. It swept past us two hundred paces to our right. In the prow stood a tall, white-cloaked figure, chanting. I could not see him plainly, but I recognized his voice as the voice of Kadu. I could even hear his words. It was a chant of vengeance against the murderers of his people, a lauding of your courage and a plea that revenge be whetted against Gerassim Berg and Urey Zakhar.

"Before I could wake you, the *bidarra* and the chant passed out of sight and sound. I sat there doubting my senses. But I saw what I saw and I heard what I heard, and I tell you the vision faithfully. The portent passes my understanding."

Ion Korelin had listened at first with a smile; then with attention caught at the mention of Kadu; then in a breath-bated silence:

"If portent it be," he said solemnly, "it must mean that Kadu has been found and murdered. That in company with those others slain during the attack and afterwards, he is watching us and keeping us mindful of our purpose. How else?"

The Admiral shook his head. Having eased himself of the vision, he was sorry now that he had told it. For his master's face showed his thoughts were back on Attoonai, and his word "purpose" gave token of what those thoughts were.

The Admiral groaned.

They pushed on that night to the next island, to have advantage of the steady and brisker wind. They reached it at daybreak. From its higher eminence they looked east and saw the majestic forests and glittering mountains of the mainland.

The wind still held. After a hasty breakfast they pushed off once more across the last stretch of their voyage. Two hours before twilight they drifted into a rock-bound shadowy cove on the shore of *Bolshaia Zemlia*, and paddled toward a landing.

"Now that we have reached the mainland, what are we going to do, master?" the Admiral inquired. "I have heard that it is peopled somewhere by colonies of civilized people. Maybe we can escape thither, possibly."

"Those colonies fringe the eastern seaboard, rogue, four thousand versts away. To the north are the French fur companies. South of them the English colonies, and far south in the tropics are the Moors. Could you cross so vast a continent, inhabited by howling savages who would murder you and cut your throat at the first sight of you? If we escape the Mainlanders on our way back to Attoonai, we shall be fortunate."

His words were no mere pessimism but an honest misgiving which came speedily to pass.

Their coming had been espied. The cove and its forest aisles seemed quiet as a chapel, as the skin-boat drifted deep in and approached a landing. But hardly had they stepped ashore and finished stamping their feet, than from the shadows of the solemn forest two dozen feathered and tall ochred warriors sprang out magically and surrounded them.

They were seized and bound. The silence of the cove was shattered by the frenzied dance-yells of their captors.

"Now may the one and one only God protect us, my rogue," Ion Korelin cried, his indomitable courage for once breaking. "We have escaped three deaths only to fall into the hands of the Mainlanders."

* * *

OF THEIR strange harsh speech he understood not a word. He had traded with them through the Aleuts, not daring to risk his small ship among tribes of so evil a reputation. Their gestures and their shouting, however, were a language which he understood only too well. From the Attoonaians he had heard of the Mainlanders's hot courage, of their cruelties to enemies that equaled the cruelties of the Siberian Chukchi.

But why should they be cruel to strangers, to men of white skin, the like of whom they had never laid eyes upon before?

In one sudden flash the reason burst into his brain. Attoonai lay somewhere within two hundred versts. The free traders, Kadu said, had carried their bloody-handed depredations up and down the mainland coast for a month, lusting to discover the source of the inland fur wealth. And now he, by reason of his white skin, was mistaken for one of the ravaging party, and his tongue was powerless to speak to them and make them know their mistake. After torture and agony he and his rogue would pay with their lives for the deeds of Gerassim Berg and Urey Zakhar!

In a fierceness of soul he cursed the irony of Providence.

The warrior party hurried their prisoners south along a shore trail. Two hours after dark they approached the main tribal camp. Runners had been sent ahead. A band of nearly a hundred warriors came out to meet the party. At sight of the white men they set up a concerted whooping that made his blood run cold.

The camp seethed with speeded preparations for a savage carnival. The tribe was drunk with blood-lust and revenge. What time the white men lay bound in a skin lodge, they were protected by a heavy guard to save them for the orderly torture.

"My rogue," said Korelin solemnly, "we have been brushed by death in many forms at many times in the years since we left the Little Mother Volga. Our luck has been overstrained, and we must needs pay off the score against us. In ten years you have been a faithful follower, more faithful to me than some whose friendship I valued higher. For my ungratefulness and my harsh words I crave pardon now."

"Nay," the Admiral interrupted, though his teeth were chattering, "I took no offense at your sharp words. I knew they were spoken more in fondness than in anger. I have been an idle and unworthy—"

Four young warriors strode into the skin lodge and broke off the words of farewell. The prisoners's bonds were cut, they were led without and the whole guard of twenty escorted them into the circle of warriors.

A solid wall of painted and nearly naked figures ringed them about. Leaping fires that sprang into the green of overhanging foliage threw a glow upon the scene. The young warriors fingered their weapons and looked impatiently at the tall chief, the tribal leader, whose word would start the sport.

The Admiral was limp with fright, and had to be dragged into the circle. But the young captain's brain was alive again. As the guards left them and fell back with the other warriors, he raised his hand in an imperative gesture for silence. A hush fell. In the hush he addressed them, a few words only, in the Aleut tongue. It was a last but a forlorn hope. At his capture he had spoken to the warriors in the island dialect without getting a response.

"I am a friend," he said simply, his clear voice slightly raised. "Those for whom you mistake me are my enemies, even as they are yours. Against them I fought a warrior's fight and lost, and was wandering at sea when I came to your shore. Let my skin be white like theirs, I am yet their enemy. Shall I therefore pay their blood-debt to you?

"If these words of mine can enter the ears of a warrior here, let that warrior stand out and speak to me face to face and discover if I lie."

While he spoke he had reached into his pocket and brought out the *Diomede* flag. He unwound the skin covering, and unfurled the cloth. Had any of the Mainlanders chanced to see the Wolf emblem on his former trips, it would speak louder to them than words could. It was a tangible thing such as their savage minds could lay hold of.

Holding it across his breast with outstretched arms, he looked slowly around the circle of warriors, knowing well that this was his last hope.

For an eternity no mainlander stirred or spoke. A restlessness, an impatience gathered.

Then an old sub-chief stepped out of the circle and walked up to him.

"Your words have entered my ears," he said in hesitant Aleut. "They are strange words, and this thing is a strange thing in your hands. What warrior's fight have you fought and lost? How can it be that your tribesmen, of pale skin like your own, are your enemies? Speak quickly."

Ion Korelin spoke. Briefly he told of his trading voyages to Attoonai, of his fights against the traders there. He told his name, the Bering Wolf, and pointed to the snarling beast inwoven on the white cloth.

His heart leaped to see the old sagamore nod as if he knew that name's repute and had heard of the battling on Attoonai.

The mainland chief now strode into the circle. To him the old man spoke earnestly, gesticulating with vigor. The chief snorted, disbelieving. Through the sagamore he put several questions at the captain. Then, appearing deeply puzzled, he raised his hand and began speaking with his tribesmen.

Again and again as he spoke, the younger warriors drowned his voice with impatient shouts. But the chief silenced them angrily and spoke straight on. A hot debate sprang up. In this the chief was joined by the sub-chiefs and older men. The argument came almost to physical blows. But the cold hauteur and authority of the chief won his point at last, whatever that point was.

He gave an order to three young men who left the circle and faded out of camp. Korelin and the Admiral, not knowing what had taken place, were carried back to the tent, were bound and heavily guarded. They lay there several hours, wondering which way the pendulum of their fate would swing.

Near morning the sagamore who spoke Aleut came into their lodge with a resin torch, cut the thongs from their feet, but left their hands bound. He bade them follow. They were led to the chief's tent, and the meaning of that night's happenings burst upon them.

Therein sat Tlewah, breathless from a long run, but pouring a tale into the ears of the mainland chief.

The Aleut's greeting was recognition enough.

Their bonds were cut, food was brought to them, they were called "brother" by the chief.

After the slaughter and dispersion of the kayak fleet beneath the sloop, Tlewah had escaped the man-hunt by coming to the mainland, as he had intended to do on the day he was intercepted by Korelin and his rogue. The three runners had gone down the coast and brought him back to prove or disprove the white man's story.

He had news of Attoonai.

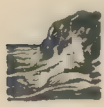
Kadu was dead. None of his followers knew when or where. He had probably been slain in the man-hunts that swept over the island after the kayak assault. Forty other Aleuts had thus been slain and all the other defiant hunters, save fifteen or eighteen, had fled to the mainland. Lyov

Vassiutkinski had gone over to the enemy and was sailing master of the sloop. The traders Gerassim Berg and Urey Zakhar were in full blossom of power on the island.

Ion Korelin was long in thought after Tlewah finished. Then until dawn he sat in deep converse with the mainland leader, speaking through Tlewah. The chief had a chieftain's courage, for he fell in with the young captain's plans. He himself had been nursing retaliation against the traders, but their strange weapons and fortifications made him wary.

Had the Admiral been listening instead of snoring beside his master, he would have shivered at the plans laid that night and the pledges solemnly exchanged.

That day a dozen warriors, as a guard of honor, took the two white men down the coast to another but smaller mainland camp From there a swift *bidarra* took him that night fifty versts across the Straits. And once again, at the first flush of dawn, the sands of Attoonai were beneath his feet.



THE mainlanders put back across the Straits to avoid discovery. Korelin, Tlewah and the Admiral hurried inland to their old hiding at the sand crater. But that covert was no longer habitable. The body of an Aleut lay face downward in the bottom of the pit with a feathered arrow-butt protruding from his back.

"Kadu!" Korelin cried, his eyes misty. "Your vision, rogue."

Tlewah flung himself forward and turned the body over. It was not Kadu. It was the body of Ouk, his lieutenant.

Tlewah, looking closely at the feathered arrow, caught his breath.

"What now?" Korelin queried, noting the Aleut's emotion.

"This is the *tyone's* barb."

"Kadu's arrow! It means what?"

"That he was slain before Ouk. Slain and stripped of his weapons. For his great bow and arrows were his especial pride."

They left the sand crater and made their way south down the island toward the *ostrog*. Only three versts distant from the harbor was the hiding wherein Kadu and some of his hunters had found safety—a dozen burrows, man burrows, cleverly concealed by shrubbery. A colony of marmots or blue island-foxes might have dug the holes.

Not a soul was there.

"It was shrewd of Kadu to hide so close to the *ostrog*," Korelin commented. "There was less danger here where they less expected a covert than farther away."

"That I discovered," said Tlewah. "My hiding was near the point of the north headland. The man-hunt missed me a dozen times by less than a bow-shot."

That same evening, just after dark, while Tlewah started out to locate the few remaining hunters, the young captain went scouting alone, with a certain purpose in his mind. He crossed the dunes to the *ostrog* and completely circled it, a hundred paces away. The gates were guarded, but no sentries paced the palisade. He crept up to the west side and lay against the palings. Inside to his right was a sick hovel, and one to his left with forty clear paces between.

His guess was correct. He had not long to wait. A candle came from the rear door of the *ostrog*. It tarried a few moments in the left-hand hovel, and then started across the clear space for the right-hand one. Prior Ioassof was making his last round for the night.

As he came within three paces, Korelin hailed him softly.

At the sudden sound of his name from the lips of a man he thought dead, the good prior uttered a cry and dropped his candle. A pair of guards came running up at the alarm. Korelin swore under his breath and flattened against the palisade.

But Prior Ioassof had recovered his wits.

"It is nothing," he assured the Cossacks. "I but stepped on a thorn in the darkness."

He went into the right-hand hovel, administered to the sick and later passed back along the palisade.

They shook hands silently and spoke in hurried whispers. To quiet Prior Ioassof's wonderment, Korelin briefly told the story of his marooning and escape.

"And now, holy friend," he added, "there is information I must possess to further my plans."

The prior shook his head sadly.

"I can tell ye nothing, Ion Korelin."

"Why not? You gave me information once before."

"But my lips are sealed now by my word of honor. In return for the liberty of ministering to the souls on this stricken Attoonai, I promised solemnly to aid or abet no enemy of these godless traders. A promise to the Archfiend himself must be kept.

"However, I council ye, Ion Korelin, to foresake thy plans and thy hopes. Whatever they are, they are futile. Nothing under the blue of heaven that ye can do will overthrow Gerassim Berg and Urey Zakhar."

The captain stroked his jaw. He seemed inclined to Prior Ioassof's view and needed only persuasion.

"Why?" he asked, after a moment. "What makes you believe I cannot overthrow them?"

"Because the *ostrog* now is doubly armed with the guns and falconets from the *Diomede*. Because the cellar is stored with ammunition to last a siege. Because the *ostrog* itself is heavily garrisoned by the Cossacks ye saw here previously and in addition now by the fifteen *promyshleniki* rescued along with Ivan Nadayof and his fair daughter from the *Hipolite*. And because the two traders are in personal command within these gates.

"Ye have seen that ye could not capture the sloop. Thy two previous attacks were hopeless, but a third would be very madness. Thy mate Lyov hath forsaken ye, Kadu and his Aleuts are no longer thy right hand. Ye have no aid save these savages. Therefore I counsel ye to hide away until a chance of escape or safety offereth itself."

TO HIMSELF, Korelin smiled. The good prior, in his zeal, had been led to give the very information sought.

"Nevertheless," he answered, "there is a proverb about the third time. For this attack I shall lead a body of warriors whose valor in hand-to-hand combat is desperate and whose worth is all beyond that of my former allies. The venture is a gamble against odds of superior weapons and position. But there is no question, whatever odds may be and however forlorn seems victory, of not fighting. I have my crew to revenge. The vengeance of these slain Attoonaians is doubly mine, for it was I who drew these traders here.

"Nay, do not try argument, Prior Ioassof, but listen to my behests. In two nights or three at the most, the attack will be made upon this *ostrog*. When it is made, I would have you and that fair Delilah out of danger's reach. For all her treachery she must be shielded. She is a woman, and I would be loath to see her harmed. Plan, therefore, to have her on some pretext outside the palisade. I shall give you word when the blow is to be struck."

Prior Ioassof demurred.

"Since her treachery I cannot address her calmly. Speech revolteth. She hath endeavored daily to speak with me and win some confidence. It is a shame that so fair a creature should harbor so guileful a heart in her breast. However, since it is ye requesting, I shall do it."

"Which of the traders is foremost in her favor now?" the young captain asked scornfully.

"She withholdeth herself still, though she inclineth strongly toward Gerassim Berg. Were she to turn her favor to Urey Zakhar, Berg would flare up in an instant like a blast of powder. That would not suit her purpose. He is headstrong and violent, whereas Zakhar bideth his time and, I think, hath his own purpose in mind."

"What purpose?" Korelin queried.

"The situation here is taut," said Prior Ioassof, speaking swiftly, with one ear toward the guards. "They have stripped almost all the furs from this region and shortly will be ready to leave. Each of them lusteth for the entire wealth of peltry they have gathered. Each of them coveteth the sloop and this Elena Nadayof. Moreover it is but logical that men such as these should quarrel when mutual danger and mutual services no longer hold them together. Already the rumblings of that quarrel are heard. Each is blaming the other for their troubles. Each claimeth his services to the partnership the more valuable. They would have been at conflict before this, were not herculean bonds holding them together. Kadu and his Aleuts were a threat. Zakhar's spies have time and again brought rumors of a Mainlander attack impending. The Cossack crew is surly and grumbling.

"So long as danger obtaineth, they will not quarrel, however jealous and covetous they be. But in very short time, when the sloop is ready to sail, those bonds will be dissolved. Zakhar's purpose that ye asked of is to murder his companion in crime, to thereby gain the ship and peltry and Elena Nadayof all for himself and to sail away. And her purpose is to withhold herself, to help along the fatal quarrel at the propitious time and marry him who surviveth and hath all the wealth. But now this foolish venture of thine—"

"Nay, holy friend," Korelin interrupted. "I am resolved. And my purpose is merely speeded by your warning. Shall I allow them, or one of them, to sail away and enjoy his wealth with the blood of my crew and the murder of a hundred Aleuts upon his head? Moreover I would give justice to this traitor Ly͡ov and this fair Delilah. Here are sins unpunished for which God himself must blush with shame."

Forestalling argument, he rose, bade hasty adieu and left.

That same night he dispatched a story stick to the mainland chief. And the next evening, an hour after dark, he spoke with Prior Ioassof again and gave notice when the assault would take place.

Instead of returning then to his hiding where fifteen Aleuts had gathered, he slipped west to the sand cove, his former rendezvous with Elena Nadayof, and there awaited midnight. In the jet dark he returned to the palisade, scaled it silently by means of a rope ladder and, with the utmost caution, approached the *ostrog*.

From the Admiral he knew something of the interior. The lower floor, half-sunken in the ground, was divided into four rooms—one of them for munitions, another for the two traders, a third for kitchen and mess, and a fourth, a very large one, for the *promyshleniki* quarters. A dark hallway connected all these rooms. The upper floor had five compartments that served a variety of uses.

Korelin's purpose at first was merely to make a bold reconnoitering around the fortress, to examine its loopholes and new defenses, and plan how best to assault. He accomplished this purpose so swiftly and well that he resolved upon a more dangerous undertaking.

At the window of the store-room he lay half an hour listening. Hearing nothing within, he made a tiny slit in the parchment, reached through and drew the bolt. With the window open, he listened again, then slipped inside. He laid hands upon a cutlas from a pile of weapons, and one other thing he took. More would have been noticed.

He could have blown the *ostrog* and all within it to bits had he been so minded. But Prior Ioassof was slumbering on the upper floor and he shrank from the thought of harming Elena Nadayof. Besides fair battle, not a sneak thief murder, was his notion of adequate justice and revenge.

When he rejoined the Admiral and his Aleuts near morning, he carried a thirty-pound keg of powder under his arm.

AT THE hour set, two hours after dark, Korelin led his fifteen Aleuts to the north point of the harborage. The mainland chief and a hundred warriors were already landed from five *bidarras* and were awaiting him.

The Mainlanders were armed with short powerful bows, with axes of copper, and with long-shafted deer spears. Some of them carried bark-wrapped bundles. They were stripped to their painted skins, and wore death masks and barbaric trophies of battle. Silent, grim, they looked a fierce and terrifying band. Korelin's hopes soared at sight of them.

He sent Tlewah and nine other Aleuts in kayaks down the harbor to the sloop. Their instructions were to wait until they heard the battle flare up at the *ostrog*, then to shoot arrows at the vessel, and by making a pretense of attack, to prevent succor being sent ashore.

Through an Aleut interpreter he outlined his plans for the battle. The chief counseled a furious assault. The captain counseled otherwise, and won his argument.

The war party moved up the landwash, rounded the harbor head and approached the *ostrog*. In the sand cove the main body halted.

The chief with eight picked warriors left to circle the fortress and dispose of the guard at the south gate. With eight others the captain left on a similar mission at the north side.

For shadowy silentness and yet lynx-quickness, the mainland warriors were a revelation to Korelin, accustomed as he was to the timorous and bungling Aleut hunters. Under his guidance they scaled the palisade wall like shadows moving up it. Beneath the denser blackness of the wall they crept cat-like upon the three *promyshleniki*. They seemed to read one another's mind and intent. Without a whisper or a gesture, they paired two men to a Cossack, sprang, bound and gagged them in utter and absolute silence.

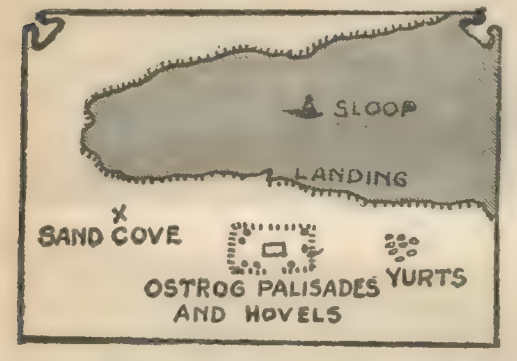
A minute after the work was finished, the low quaver-call of a sand owl floated across the *ostrog* court in signal that the mainland chief had had a like success.

The gates were unbarred and opened.

The main party at the sand cove split, one-half to each gate. The Admiral, carrying the keg of powder, a fuse for it and a lighted punk concealed within a ram's horn, joined his master.

Save for an accident, an unforeseen vagary of luck, the war party would have crept upon, surprized and captured the *ostrog* before the traders knew they were being assailed.

From a sick-hovel near the gate where Korelin with his fifty warriors and five Aleuts was waiting, a wretch emaciated with scurvy crept out to chat with his former comrades, the guards. The two Aleuts whom he stumbled first upon bungled their job. The Cossack's voice split the solid night with a yell of alarm.



"*K'oruzhiyu! Ostrog! Nepreyateli! K'oruzhiyu!*"

A sentinel at the *ostrog* fired his musket.

Across the court the mainland chief and his warriors loosed a furious den of whooping, and showered arrows into the fortress. It was no part of the plan for them to attack yet. They drew a quick hot fire from the musketry and falconets. Three guns boomed and lit the courtyard for an instant with their flashes.

When this diversion drew the attention of the *ostrog's* garrison, the captain's time to act had come. Keeping the Admiral at his elbow and surrounded by a knot of a dozen picked warriors, he charged the rear of the building. No fire leaped to meet them. They gained the rear door and assaulted it with axes.

Once it was battered down and the powerful charge tossed inside, the battle would end suddenly.

But the axes awakened the garrison to its new danger. A musket at an upper loophole cracked, and a Mainlander fell. Three, five, a dozen ropes of fire, and a falconet barked. Two Cossacks were killed by the Mainlander arrows that probed for the loopholes and windows. But in face of the hot fire the assailants could not stand. Their leader drew them back outside the palisade, and they found shelter behind sand ridges.

The *ostrog* guns kept up their booming. With brutal disregard of their sick men, the traders splintered the hovels wherein they thought the assailants might be lurking. The falconets and musketry burnt useless powder at the jet blackness within the palisade. The assailants lay quietly in their safety, waiting the next strategy of their leaders.

Korelin had placed little hope upon the first assault. His chiefest blows were yet to fall.

Gradually the harmless fusilade slackened. In the silence guns could be heard booming on the sloop in harbor. It was evidence that Tlewah and his nine were doing their work well.

Then from the south side of the *ostrog* where the mainland chief held his warriors, a tiny wisp of flame rose high in air, arched, blazed as it fell, and stuck on the *ostrog* roof. Another and another followed, till the air looked full of falling stars and till the *ostrog* roof was afire in a dozen places. Korelin and ten warriors crept through a hole in the palisade and lay forty steps from the fortress.

The traders and their Cossacks were not idle. Axes crashed a hole through the roof. A *promyshlenik* crawled out upon the slope. Bows twanged around the captain. The *promyshlenik* leaped into the air and fell thuddingly to the ground. Another followed and met the same fate. Still a third came out, with a shelter plate of iron in front of him. Three warriors wriggled off to one side to get a clear shot at him, and the third Cossack rolled to the ground. The flames grew.

Axes now crashed through the roof in a dozen places. The garrison fought the blazes with hides wrapped on musket barrels. At cost of five men, the worst flames were put out and the others controlled.

THE fire arrows ceased. They had done what the young captain intended. His whole strategy that night lay in whittling the garrison man-power down to a point where superior weapons and position could no longer save the *ostrog*.

Now from each side, a dozen bowmen bellied up within a few paces of the wall till they could dimly see the loopholes and windows. Each loosed a single arrow and fled. Not one of them received a wound. But shouts and cries within the fortress were token that not all the arrows had missed.

Once again Korelin tried for success with the powder charge. Thirty warriors crept up within as many paces of the *ostrog*, and searched out the upper tier of loopholes with their deadly arrows. Korelin, the Admiral and a dozen others rose and hurled themselves at the door. Their assault shattered it.

Before they could finish their work, the defenders shooting from the lower holes and the ground windows where the arrows dare not be directed, drove them back a second time. Three warriors fell. The captain took a musket ball through his leg which all but disabled him.

The failure was yet a victory for the assailants. Within the fortress four Cossacks had fallen and two others were wounded beyond fighting.

On the south side the mainland chief attempted the next assault. Scattered in a thin front to escape heavy loss, his warriors leaped across to the *ostrog* walls in face of a brisk fire. Several of them fell, but the others reached the loopholes and worked a havoc before they were driven back. Some of them thrust long spears through the apertures and spitted *promyshleniki* within. Others at the windows actually seized musket barrels, wrenched the weapons from Cossack hands and poured a rain of arrows into the room. The assailants were forced to flee at last, but their defeat was again a victory.

While the battle hung idle, with only desultory hostilities on each side, Korelin and the mainland chief sought each other in council.

Unmindful of his bleeding wound, the captain was grimly elated. So far the assault had succeeded in pace with his expectations. He had set the early hour for the attack in order to have a whole night in which to carry through his plans. He knew the garrison had suffered a score at least of slain and wounded. He knew that eight hours of one assault after another would break their nerve and undermine their courage, so that before dawn, when he should hail them and proffer safety to all but Gerassim Berg and Urey Zakhar, the garrison would probably capitulate. Or, lacking surrender, he knew that they would be reduced to a handful which could not defend the *ostrog* against a determined storm.

His counsel therefore was patience.

But the mainland chief had other counsel, and gave good reason for it. His warriors, reckless and superb of courage in a short, bloody hand-to-hand fight, were breaking in the face of hot fire from an enemy with whom they could not come to grips. Already their courage was waning. They were losing stomach for the battle. He could brace them again for a last concerted attack, but it had to be made at once or they would break from his leadership and flee for their boats.

Among his own warriors Korelin had noted the signs. Reluctantly, against his own judgment, he agreed. They laid their plans for the last assault, which stood to win or lose the battle.

Half of the chief's own band of warriors were to attack the west side of the *ostrog*, to rain arrows through the loopholes and draw most of the defenders there. Then the chief, the captain and the other fifty warriors were to assail the rear door, burst it open with a ram torn from the palisade wall, and plant the powerful charge. Failing this last, they were to pour inside and come to final grips.

The two leaders massed their men, explained the plans, and exhorted them to courage. The chief's war-whoop gave the signal.

Two dozen Mainlanders on the south side leaped forward to attack. They drew a heavy fire, but came on to the very walls.

With the Admiral at his heels, Korelin gave the order to his band. The mainland chief and he, side by side, led the storm against the shattered rear door of the *ostrog*.

They were met by withering musketry and belching fire from two of the *Diomede's* guns. It seemed the defenders knew it was life or death to them in the next few seconds. In spite of ten warriors slain outright, the others hurtled themselves against the door and broke it down.

The Cossacks met them with pistol, cutlas and clubbed muskets. For a moment the battle surged back and forth across the threshold. Then a knot of warriors led by Korelin and the chief crashed impetuously, bodily, into the sunken hallway. The defenders bellowed for help.

In that fatal second, while he fought within the fortress, Ion Korelin shouted for his servant. But the Admiral had been torn from his side by the fierce *mêlée* at the door.

The assailants were hurled back over the threshold by a wild, despairing charge of fifteen Cossacks. Korelin and the chief with two dozen warriors crashed inside a second time. Pistols flashed in their faces. Musket fire played upon them. The acrid stench of powder choked them. But they crashed on down the hallway, maddened. The fortress rocked with warwhoops; with sibilant Cossack oaths; with the shrieks of men stricken; with the thud of dull blows; the trampling of men underfoot; the fury of a frenzied, locked battle.

Ten fresh *promyshleniki* had answered the yells for help. With longswords they hurled themselves against the inrush and checked it.

Outside, a long-drawn, high concerted yell burst from the Mainlanders.

Agai! Agai! Agai-ii-ii!

The press from behind stopped suddenly. The warriors had broken.

A musket stock crashed sickeningly against Ion Korelin's head. He staggered, but fought on in a daze.

He thought that behind him he could hear Kadu, the Aleut *tyone*, shouting, trying to rally the warriors.

The mainland chief was down. His warriors were pouring out of the door.

Even as he whirled his cutlas to clear his retreat, another clubbed musket smote the captain. He pitched senseless to the floor.

IV

WHEN Korelin came back to consciousness, he was aware first of an intolerable pain in his wounded leg and a hammering in his head. Then of the dawn filtering through a row of loopholes. Then of thongs binding his hands and feet. Then of Prior Ioassof kneeling beside him. And lastly of two stalwart Cossacks standing guard within the room.

He could not yet place himself nor understand.

"The assault?" he asked feebly, when he could speak.

Prior Ioassof crossed himself.

"Utterly and completely it failed, at the moment when victory wavered. The Mainlanders have vanished after their defeat. The *ostrog* and harbor are cleared. The *tyone* and the Mainland chief are prisoners in the next room."

"Kadu—" the captain's mind whirled. "And my rogue—dead or a prisoner?"

"Nay, I saw him not among the slain, and he is not a prisoner."

Korelin closed his eyes and a shiver ran through him.

"But let us not talk of battle or things of earth," the prior added, in low solemn voice. "Ye have only a few minutes to prepare. I came to shrive ye."

"Will it then be shortly?" he asked, quietly.

"As shortly as Gerassim Berg and Urey Zakhar decide which of them shall have the privilege—"

"The good prior broke off, aghast at what he had been about to say.

"Of chopping off my head," Korelin finished. "Are they at odds concerning that?"

"Nay, not at odds, but even now at mortal combat."

Korelin would have sat up but for his bonds and his wounds.

"You jest!" he exclaimed, not believing.

There was no hint of jest upon the prior's face.

"I swear there is consolation in knowing that! By the heavens, before you shrive me I must hear."

Prior Ioassof glanced at the guards, then bent low and spoke hurriedly.

"The storm hath broken, Ion Korelin. The very least and all of the prophecies I made ye have come to pass with this dawn. The bonds between these traders have been severed. The Mainlander threat is past. Kadu, the chief, and thyself are prisoners, awaiting death. The last danger is crushed. They are at the moment of their supreme triumph. Moreover, it is time they should depart. The furs of this region are all theirs. The Cossacks are demanding to leave this island of incessant battle. Neither danger nor mutual service holdeth the traders together. Their jealousy and their covetousness have flared out."

"I understand, save that they should be in so headlong a haste to quarrel and fight, unless—"

"Ye have guessed shrewdly. There was ample cause for their hot haste. As ye bade me, I led Elena Nadayof out of the palisade on some pretext. When the battle opened, I left her and went alone to pray for thy success. When the firing ceased we came back and found ye prisoner and the *ostrog* cleared. She knew a quarrel impended between the traders. She knew that Urey Zakhar carried a hidden brace of pistols against the moment of that quarrel, and would be the survivor. Therefore she switched her favor to Zakhar. She openly gave him her promise.

"As I prophesied, Gerassim Berg flared up like the volcano he is. Adroitly Zakhar proposed a duel with swords, Berg's own weapon. And he, fire-eating, deceived fool, fairly leaped at the challenge. All this, Ion Korelin, in the one short hour before dawn! With daylight come and their enemy vanished, they have a moment since stalked out to settle their accounts. Zakhar will be back presently, sole master. Now turn thy thoughts from these things."

But the good prior's second attempt at shriving was interrupted by Elena Nadayof.

AT HER slight, imperious gesture the two Cossacks stepped into the doorway and hid what happened from the weary guards in the next room.

She ran across to the young captain, bent over him swiftly, cut his bonds.

"Get up!" she whispered sharply. "We have only a few moments for our work. The Cossacks are leaderless. Come!"

She proffered him a flask of strong wine.

"You must find strength to lead. The Cossacks fear you as a fiend. Ion Korelin, hasten."

Prior Ioassof blessed himself in astonishment. Korelin was an instant dumbfounded; but recovering himself, he stared coldly into her eyes.

"What fresh treachery now?" he asked scornfully, without stirring.

She started up.

"Treachery?"

"Yes, treachery, as you practised upon us when we attacked the sloop."

Elena Nadayof blanched. She tried to speak.

"Go!" he repeated.

Instead she dropped to her knees beside him, her face close to his.

"Get up and come," she pleaded, slipping her hand beneath his head. "There is no time for words, If either of those two return, it is too late. After we have snatched life and victory out of the hands of defeat and death, then will be time for your scorn. Ion, Ion Korelin, come."

She helped him to his feet. His senses reeled with pain, but he gripped them. His mind was a whirl of questions, but he asked none. There was fighting ahead. What, he knew not. Something of her desperate haste flowed into him.

One of the guards handed him a double-barreled pistol. She pressed the flask upon him again. He drank.

"Agus and Feodor—" she indicated the guards— "are with us. We must capture the two in the next room and release the two prisoners. That will make six of us. On the lower floor are seven more waiting to join us."

"Who?" he found speech to ask.

"*Promyshleniki*. Those who survived from the *Hipolite* and lived through your attack last night. We will be thirteen against twice that number, but the others are half drunk and half asleep and leaderless. Besides, we can trap them."

At a sign from her, one of the guards called sharply to the pair in the next room. They strode in to inquire. Beneath the four men they were seized, hands clapped over their mouths and they were bound. The girl tore strips from her garments.

They ran into the next room, released Kadu and the mainland chief and spoke a brief word to them. Then the six men followed Elena Nadayof down the stairway to the dark corridor on the ground floor. A *promyshlenik* with musket patroled the hallway. He fell in with them.

The door of the magazine opened at her tap. Six others of the *Hipolite* crew were there. They fairly bristled with muskets, pistols and longswords, and they held arms for the others of the party.

As he buckled on a longsword and caught up another pistol, the captain had time to marvel at the thoroughness of Elena Nadayof's plans.

The whole party of fourteen crept silently up the hallway to the main room at the front, the Cossack quarters.

Korelin threw open the door and stood on the threshold, leaning on his longsword, with a pistol in his left hand.

Behind him four of the party had knelt, their muskets pointed inside the room. Over their shoulders bristled a second and a third tier of muzzles covering the crew of the traders.

Within the quarters were twenty-three Cossacks. Half of them lay sprawled on brown-bear rugs, asleep. The others were drinkling and grumbling. Scarcely a one of them but was freshly bandaged.

Not one of them was fit in body for another hand-to-hand and bloody combat.

Their slow, kvass-stupefied minds did not at first understand the spectacle that burst upon them so startlingly. They stared dumbfounded at the Bering Wolf and at their erstwhile comrades whom he led.

"What jest is this, Agus?" one of them demanded, wetting his thick lips.

"Your death, Yermak," the *promyshlenik* whipped back, "if you reach a hand for a weapon. But your safety and good fortune if you yield peacefully. Gerassim Berg and Urey Zakhar have come to blows and are off settling their long-standing accounts. The *ostrog* is ours. The sloop in harbor is under the mastery of Lyov Vassiutkinski, who alone can sail it. It will be ours as shortly as he can persuade the crew to a change of heart. Have the murder and rapine and pillage of Berg and Zakhar led you into enough bloody battles? Have you seen enough of your comrades die defending this iniquity? Have you had enough of battling against the Bering Wolf? Will you submit? Or shall we try conclusions here and now, muskets against bare fists?"

The Cossacks were not the kind of men who submit. Yermak, the one who had spoken, growled in his beard and reached for a cutlas. A dozen others leaped to their feet with oaths. Had they had a leader, they would have rushed the door in spite of all the muzzles. Even leaderless, they were gathering courage, and Yermak was raising his cutlas to lead them.

"Hold!" Korelin bade the men behind him, as their muskets clicked in readiness.

He opened his lips and would have spoken to the Cossacks. But before he could speak, a sudden tremendous explosion from somewhere without the palisade shook the *ostrog* like a small earthquake. The blast was so unexpected and so strange that Korelin could not gather his thoughts and reason what it meant.

Elena Nadayof was quicker-witted.

"The signal!" she cried. "It is Lyov Vassiutkinski's signal. The sloop is ours!"

It was the last straw. Yermak's cutlas dropped to the floor. The courage of the Cossacks vanished.

"File out one by one," Korelin ordered, seizing the right instant. "You will be bound and so held until this business is finished. Then, upon my promise of honor, you shall be released and shall have passage to Kamchatka and some shall have service, as you like."

They filed out one by one, not altogether reluctant. As they passed to the rear of their captors, they were bound hand and foot and carried to the room where Korelin had lain prisoner. Three of Elena Nadayof's *promyshleniki*, with several muskets apiece, mounted guard over them. The other six went after the sentries at the gates and brought them back in a trice.

In less than five minutes the *ostrog* had fallen without a musket being fired or a drop of blood being spilled.

THE young captain dispatched a *promyshleniky* to the sloop, with word of the *ostrog's* capture. Along with this word went the emblem of the *Diomede.*

Then in the hallway he rejoined a party that was breathless and half incredulous of their own swift success—Kadu, the tall mainland chief, Prior Ioassof, and Elena Nadayof.

"It is time and beyond time," said she. "that Urey Zakhar should return from murdering that monster, Gerassim Berg."

Ion Korelin started. Her words brought back to his mind the something which was yet to be done. Though a thousand questions were on his tongue's end, he asked none of them. With a gesture to Prior Ioassof he strode through the rear door, the door he had shattered from its wood hinges six hours before. Kadu followed him.

"The something yet to be done is not for a woman's eyes to see," said he softly. "Nor for yours, holy friend."

The prior gestured toward the cove.

"Nay, if need be, Ion Korelin, I shall lend ye a hand in that something, and do Heaven a better service than ever I have rendered."

"Have you read the riddle of this morning's work of hers?"

The prior shook his head.

"I have had no more time than ye to think. But I perceived she hath laid deep plans in secret, and hath shrewdly used the jealously and lust of these traders to achieve that which all thy dogged courage in three mortal battles had failed to achieve. Did ye note what a blow thy scorn and thy charge of treachery struck her?"

Korelin winced.

"And after victory was in our hands, did ye note that she turned her head away from ye when ye wanted to speak to her? If our thoughts of her were unjust, as they needs must be after this morning's work, can ye blame her for spurning ye more scornfully than ye spurned her?"

Korelin drew a hand across his eyes and spoke in the Aleut to Kadu:

"My head throbs still from that musket stock last night, and I cannot think. Your own actions, brother, are bound up in this riddle. Where have you been hiding these four days since I landed? How came you to join our battle at the last moment? Tlewah and myself and all your friends thought you dead."

"So I desired my hunters to think. I knew not whom to trust. Not only my life but yours, I thought, depended upon my utter secrecy. One of my chiefest men had been a traitor to me. For his treachery I slew him in that sand crater hiding and lest there were other spies among my hunters, I let it be thought that I was dead.

"Nay," Korelin interrupted. "Speak plainly, Kadu. Your mission and your secrecy mean nothing in my ears. What happened since we last met?"

The Aleut *tyone* drew a long breath.

"When I leaped overboard that night of our kayak attack, I swam in circles till I knew you had been taken. Then I swam ashore and hurried to the *ostrog* and spoke with this woman. How she saved your life I do not know. From one of her followers on the ship, she learned something of the island's location and told me. I was hiding for my life and beset with difficulties. It was half a moon before I secured a *bidarra* and went after you, as she had planned. I traveled up the mainland coast at night. The *promyshlenik's* directions were vague. We searched a handful of islands lying three days' travel north of the island where you were. Then we came back to the mainland, came south and struck out upon the sea a second time. We found the island, we saw your signs, but you were gone. We hurried back heavy-hearted, and we landed while the battle was drawing to its head.

"She sent you after me?" Korelin demanded.

"We needed your leadership," Kadu answered. "Your name held a terror for these Cossacks. We did not intend to strike until we had brought you back, and the time was ripe."

"We?"

"This woman and I and your mate Lyov. His part was to deliver the sloop into our hands."

"Can you answer a plain question plainly?" Korelin demanded sharply. "Why did Elena Nadayof disclose our plans of the kayak attack to these just ahead of us?"

"Did I not tell you that I slew the one who disclosed those plans? He was Ouk, one of Zakhar's spies."

"Nay," Korelin objected. "From her own lips Elena Nadayof reminded the traders that she herself had informed them. It was her chiefest argument when she pleaded to save my life."

"She did inform them," Kadu admitted, "in order to throw suspicion from herself and win their favor. But she informed them, brother, after she knew that they knew. After this traitorous Ouk had told them. And then she tried to get a message to me to forestall the attack. The runner never reached me, and our disaster was the consequence. Days afterward I found that runner murdered and dragged into a thicket. An arrow, dropped unknowingly, told me who had betrayed us and ambushed our messenger, or I would not yet know. I tracked Ouk down and shot him."

The captain, his head awhirl, turned to the prior at his elbow.

"Holy friend, hold your ears wide. Here is a tale to split them. What a train of powder she has been laying, and set it off this morning!"

BUT the tale and the good prior's amazement were interrupted by an outcry ahead. Out of a mat of sand-grass, the Admiral popped up and came running toward them spilling over with questions.

He was splattered with blood, his clothes were tattered, he looked as if he had been shot through a thicket of devil's club.

"Be quiet, rogue!" his master bade him sternly, to hide his own joy at the sight of his rascal alive. "The *ostrog* is ours in spite of your cowardly running away with the powder."

"The *ostrog* ours? How can that be, master, when you have not finished off Gerassim Berg and Urey Zakhar?"

"Did they pass here?"

"Aye, they passed!" the rogue said archly. "Aye, they passed, master."

"Lead us where!"

The Admiral fell in the lead, taking huge strides toward the sand cove.

"I was hiding in covert there ahead, master," said he, "after having been forced to quit the battle. I remembered your words about a close hiding being the safer, and I thought that if three versts away were good, three hundred paces away were better. I had my keg of powder and torch, and after reorganizing myself, I meant to attack the *ostrog* with them.

"Then I heard voices, and here came the traders, walking apart, quarreling, and keeping an eye on each other. I slipped over that little ridge yonder—nay, there was a ridge there then—and watched. Gerassim Berg drew his sword and roared to Zakhar to draw also. Zakhar drew a pistol and aimed it. But a moment, master, see that big hole yonder and the shrubbery flattened for thirty paces all around it?

"That was the little sand cove. While Berg had eyes only for that pistol and Zakhar had eyes only for Berg, I suddenly and all at once thought me how merrily my keg would roll down the ridge. I started it rolling, but I forgot to run and escape. I went up part way with Gerassim Berg and Urey Zakhar. But whereas I came down again in a few minutes and fell with a terrific thump, they, being right over the keg, have not yet—"

"Rogue," interrupted his master as he gazed down at the demolished sand cove, "I am undecided whether to wring your neck for depriving me of a pleasure, or to set you down in the *ostrog* shade with a keg of wine. While we go back, I shall debate it."

They started for the *ostrog*.

"The explosion we heard was no signal then," Prior Ioassof commented. "She said it was, but surely she could not have known what it meant. Rememberest ye, Ion Korelin, when the Cossacks were making up their minds to assail us? Was she quicker of wit again than we?"

"Nay, in God's name," Korelin answered, striding swiftly for the building. "No more riddles, holy friend. My brain seethes with them now. Do you and Kadu and the rogue remain outside the *ostrog* and with his bauble watch for the *Diomede* emblem to be raised over the sloop."

INSIDE the *ostrog* the young captain stood and knocked at a door. For several moments there was no answer. Then a voice that seemed half-choked with tears, inquired what he wanted.

"A chance to crave your pardon on my knees," he answered humbly.

"The pardon of a treacherous woman is not worth asking," came scornfully from behind the door.

"Then let me thank you for having thrice saved my life."

"I can hear. If you must, say your thanks and go."

"Nay, but at this remove, they would be empty thanks."

"After your haughty scorn, indomitable captain, they would ring hollow anyway."

Ion Korelin was floundered like a high brig without ballast.

"But how was I to know the truth?" he pleaded. "The very words that fell from your lips were repeated to me."

"You should have known."

"But how, my vision?"

"Your pit-fall and your Delilah! Will you go?"

"Not until you receive my thanks for my unworthy life."

"I receive them."

"And I have your forgiveness."

"You have it."

"And your pardon."

"And it, too."

And once again Korelin was all at sea. But he did not go.

For he had heard a faltering in the voice that bade him leave, and the last three words were hesitant whispers. He tacked, though without knowing where to steer.

"My vision," he persisted again.

No answer.

"If you bid me go, I shall go."

No answer.

Being a man of indomitable courage and hope, Ion Korelin softly opened the door, stood a moment on the threshold, and then stepped within.

The Madness of John O'Keefe

By John Murray Reynolds

Author of "El Carcel," "Medicinal Methods," etc.

IN TRUTH, señor, you *Americanos* are a mad lot. You will please to take no offense at my saying it, for I am a philosopher as well as a man of business, and we philosophers may say such things without offense. You are surely mad, for you work at a furious rate during your whole lives, which is not what the good God intended, and you act from motives no man can understand. It extends even unto little things—you wash so frequently! I speak truth, señor, for I have known many men of your nation and observed them closely. Yet, which is the greatest miracle of all, this madness of yours usually works to your own advantage in the end, as was well shown by a thing that occurred this very year among the men of *la compañia*.

Ah, yes, señor, I refer to the Caribbean Steamship Line. In Caimanítas, when one says *la compañia* one always refers to the Line. The local manager, John O'Keefe, is the man of most importance in the city. It is true that there is an *alcalde* and some minor officials, but when O'Keefe desires a thing—it happens.

And I? I am Enrique Machado, señor, you have heard of me, no? No? It is evident that you are a newcomer, señor, for all men know Don Enrique Machado. Second only in importance to the manager of *la compañia* is the superintendent of the docks, whom you now see before you. Mine is the task to oversee all the work of the docks and the warehouse, and also to be chief assistant and guide of *el Amo. El Amo*—the Master? I refer to O'Keefe, señor, it is thus that we call him. He depends greatly on my advice and thinks most highly of my judgment. He is a very great man, señor.

That incident of madness to which I referred? Gladly will I tell of it, señor, gladly. But talking is work of a great dryness around the throat. There is a beer called La Tropical, a native beer which is not at all bad. If the señor desires—*bueno*, you are generous.

As you know, señor, or if you do not know I will tell you, this Caimanítas of ours is a lighterage port. Lean a little to the side in your chair and look out. From where we sit here in the cafè of El Comercio you can see down the Avenida Marti to the waterfront. There are docks and warehouses there; but the water is shallow and the steamers do not come, only the lighters. Eighteen miles out to sea lies the anchorage of Cayo Ingles. It is there that the steamers must stay, and all cargo must be taken in or out in the bluff-bowed lighters. Just at the foot of this street is the terminal of *la compañia*, the docks of which I am the superintendent.

Si, señor, mine is a position of responsibility and honor. The *alcalde* raises his hat to me when we meet in the Plaza of an evening. And, as I have said, I enjoy the confidence of *el Amo*. It is of him I would speak. I would not have it come to his ears that I have talked of him, for *el Amo* is a hard man, and if he knew I would have to go elsewhere—*pronto!* You are a man of discretion? *Bueno!*

It was six years ago that *el Amo* first came to Caimanítas as local manager for *la compañia*, señor, and it was less than a year later that he made me superintendent of the docks. *El Amo* is a keen judge of men. Things were in a bad way for the Line when first he came—competitors had stolen most of the business; docks, warehouse and lighters were in bad shape; the stevedores were dissatisfied and unmanageable; everything was run down. Old Don Emilio who had been agent for many years had grown too old, and things had slipped away from him. Then came O'Keefe, and with him the madness of the *Americanos*. Things happened so fast that a man had no time to think. *El Amo* moved around like the devil himself, and it was to wonder what would happen next. In a year all was changed. From a minor office, the Caimanítas branch of *la compañia* had become one of the branches of greatest business and prosperity. All this was due to O'Keefe, señor, and one would think that *la compañia* would have been grateful—but that is the matter of which I will speak later.

One incident will show the ways of *el Amo*. There was, at the time he first came, a man among the stevedores called Luis Maduro. This Luis was a huge bull of a man, a *fiera* as we say, and he did not like the stern discipline and hard work which *el Amo* had substituted for the easy-going ways of old Don Emilio who was before him. He was a trouble maker, that Luis, but for a while *el Amo* paid no attention to him. Then one day *el Amo* found Luis stealing goods from one of the boxes of cargo in the warehouse on the dock. That was before I became superintendent—I assure the señor no such thing could happen now. O'Keefe spoke quietly, but in a tone that had in it a great deal of deadliness; he told Luis what he thought of him, and *el Amo* was a man of violent thoughts. Luis had often said that he had no fear of O'Keefe and would break him in pieces of a remarkable smallness if *el Amo* ever tried to give him orders. Luis now felt the eyes of all of us upon him, so he replied with that gesture which is the ultimate among insults.

El Amo had lived too long in Spanish countries not to know what it meant, and his face went pale. I was sitting on a near-by bale of bags and saw it all. Luis was twice the size of O'Keefe, but in no more than the time it takes a man to light a *cigarillo*—lighting it with care so that it will draw evenly, so—he lay on the floor without movement, breathing loudly through his nose. *El Amo* had moved his clenched hands with an unbelievable rapidity, and all those in the warehouse stared at him with round eyes. Those who had seen told those who had not, and the tale grew in the telling, so that the wishes of *el Amo* were not questioned as they had been. After seeing that which I have just described, I myself replaced some few articles I had in my pockets and went quietly away.

BUT it is of the madness of O'Keefe that the señor would hear. It happened about six months ago, in the grinding season. You must know, señor, that in a Cuban sea port like this Caimanítas of ours the year is divided into two parts—the *zafra* or season in winter when the sugar mills are all grinding, and the summer season when we have little to do but sit around in such shade as there is and talk and drink La Tropical beer. Another? *Si*, señor, since you are so generous.

During the *zafra*, or grinding, season life is of a very great business, particularly for us of *la compañia*, for then the anchorage is always full of steamers and the lighters are continually moving to and fro. I have little time to myself for philosophic meditation and other purposes then, señor, I who am dock superintendent, but *el Amo* works harder—even harder than I. From four in the morning until late at night he is as busy as an ant in a heap of carrion—yes, even busier than I. *El Amo* is a most remarkable man.

Lean a little aside in your chair and look down the street, señor, to where the Avenida Marti—named for one of our greatest Cuban patriots—ends at the water-front. See that building on the corner, the building of but one story, with the whitewashed walls of a strange cleanliness and the blue flag flying above the red-tiled roof? That is the office of *la compañia*, and that flag is the one flown by all its steamers. It was in that office that I witnessed the first act of the drama that ended in the madness of O'Keefe.

It was a hot evening in early March, during the height of the grinding season. *El*

Amo had returned to the office after dark and had phoned me to come to the office. We talked for a while of various matters to be attended to the coming day—*el Amo* depends greatly on my judgment—and then he began to open a pile of letters that lay on his desk. Some of them had been lying there unopened for several days; so busy is life during the *zafra*. He opened one that came in the brown envelope of the New York office of *la compañia*. As he read I saw him grow pale, and then very red. He jumped to his feet and began to walk rapidly back and forth across the office. I have seen a caged *tigre*, señor, and O'Keefe greatly resembled him then. When he came near a chair he kicked it savagely aside. Three *cigarros* did he light, *cigarros* of an expensiveness from Habana, and threw each one to the floor after but a few puffs. There was nothing wrong with the *cigarros*, for I smoked them the next day. There was a savage light in the eyes of *el Amo*, and I thought it well to remain unobtrusively silent, as is the way of us philosophers.

Although I tried, I could not read the letter which he still carried in his hand. Do not misunderstand me, señor, it was simply that I felt it my duty to know as much as possible of a matter which troubled *el Amo* so greatly. As he strode back and forth across the office he said things, things in English I had never heard and did not understand, but that cut the air like the cracking of a whip, things in our own Spanish tongue that I could not have said better myself. At last he stopped and thrust out the letter for me to read. It was from the president of *la compañia*, and it begged to inform O'Keefe that because of the many irregularities in his accounts he was dismissed and that his successor would arrive in a few days.

No, señor, it was not then that the madness came upon O'Keefe. That is the way of you *Americanos*, your madness comes when least to be expected. This unjust action of *la compañia*—for the charges were false and they had not even given him an opportunity for defense—only made *el Amo* very angry and bitter; which is what it would have done to any sane man. He walked from the office with black anger in his heart, saying that he would never enter it again. He is a hard man, *el Amo*, and not one to submit tamely to an affront. I did not leave my job along with him, for am I not a man of family? There is always rent to be paid and rice and *platanos* to be bought.

The letter had been unopened in the office for some days, señor, and so it was that the man who was to succeed *el Amo* arrived the very next day. They met by accident, right out there in the center of the Avenida Marti, exactly on the spot where that dead dog of great odor now lies in the gutter, and I saw them meet. O'Keefe was walking toward the *Oficina de Telegrafos*—he had already started to negotiate about some position in Santo Domingo—when a thin American stepped out of the hotel here. *El Amo* stopped dead when he saw him, and they looked at each other for the time in which a man might make three strokes of a machete, and then *el Amo* said—

"You!"

He said it savagely, señor, in the tone one uses when desiring to insult. The other man smiled with his lips though not with his eyes and held out his hand.

"I'm sorry it had to be this way, O'Keefe," he said.

I remember the words so well, señor, because I had come near to listen, thinking that the more I knew of the matter the more I could help *el Amo*. The other man continued:

"The Line sends me, O'Keefe—I can't help it. Won't you come and talk things over?"

To which *el Amo*, still speaking in a low and angry voice, replied—

"I have sworn never to enter the company's office or have dealings with a company employee again," and he pretended that he did not see the other's hand.

It is a serious thing to ignore a man's outstretched hand in public, señor, but I am a hard man, and I like hard men, and it pleased me to see *el Amo* so angry and bitter. That was as it should be.

The other man—we later came to know that his name was Mowbray—dropped his hand to his side and was about to reply, when a woman came out of the hotel behind him. She was only a shadow of a woman, señor, thin and pale and not like the buxom maidens of Caimanítas. Has the señor walked down the Street of San Isidro of an evening—but no matter. This woman was dressed all in white and she had pale yellow hair the color of Bacardí and a look of weariness around her eyes. She paid no attention to this Mowbray who was her husband, but walked straight up to *el Amo* and said—

"John!"

She said just that one word, señor, that and nothing else. *El Amo* looked at her and his face seemed to soften a little, then it grew cold again and he remained silent. When he did not speak she sighed and said—

"It is a long time since I have seen you, John." He replied coldly:

"It's through no desire of mine that you see me now," and then turned his back and strode away.

The others looked after him; the man with a weak anger showing on his face, the woman with a strangely tragic expression around the eyes. I thought it was well to go and speak to them then, since the man was my new chief and I am also a working man.

That Mowbray was a fool, señor. He knew nothing of men, nor of how to handle a situation like we have here in Caimanítas during the grinding season. He took no heed of the advice of great value I offered him and told me to be silent until spoken to. I, who have been the right hand man of *el Amo* for five long years. He was one of those men who are fated to fail from the start. Within two days he had the four clerks who are the office force against him, and then everything began to go wrong. Almost I felt sorry for him at times, but I hardened my heart when I thought of *el Amo* and delighted to see the affairs of *la compañia* going so badly.

EL AMO? He was still here in Caimanítas, señor. He had made arrangements about something over in Santo Domingo—I do not know the details—and was waiting for a schooner that could take him across the Windward Passage. Several times they met on the street, he and that Mowbray or the pale-faced woman, and always *el Amo* went by with his face set and his eyes fixed on the towers of the Cathedral or the hill of *El Yunque* or some other distant and lofty place. After that first meeting they did not attempt to speak to him. When they had passed, that Mowbray would grow red and sullen looking, but the woman merely looked sad. I, who am Enrique Machado, the philosopher, could tell that there was a tragedy in her life and that her husband did not treat her well, but of this I said nothing to *el Amo*.

Things happened fast during the next ten days, señor. I would not have believed that any man could have done as much harm as that Mowbray did, all without meaning to. How he obtained the position is of a great mysteriousness to me; probably it was through what you *Americanos* call the "pull." It is of a certainty that he knew no more of the business of steamships than old Faustino Valls, who has been both blind and deaf since birth and passes the whole day there where you see him on the cathedral steps. Believe me or not, señor, within ten days that Mowbray had so angered the big merchants of the city—always without intention—that they even talked of trying to persuade some other Line to run steamers to Caimanítas. Also, he quarreled with the *gremios*, both of the *estibadores* and of the *lancheros*, or men of the lighters. The stevedores are very strong, but men of little brain, the *lancheros* are more men of my own sort, possessing both qualities. Neither are men to be trifled with, señor, and I could see that a strike or worse would very soon be happening.

All these things I told to *el Amo*, who took a great and bitter pleasure therein. It was easy to see that he hoped things would get even worse, which is but natural, seeing that *la compañia* had treated him so badly.

Well, señor, since you ask it—I was undecided. My position was of a great peculiarness. As dock superintendent I was an important man in *la compañia*, but also I am a native of Caimanítas. That Mowbray was trying to make changes that would rob my countrymen of some of their established rights, and we philosophers believe in rights. It is true that the stevedores made certain ridiculous threats of violence to me if I interfered, but I heeded them no more than the babbling of a *niño*. It was the principle that I considered, señor—the principle.

Both *gremios* went on strike on the same day as I had expected, and *el Amo* grinned when I told him of it. Not many men have their revenge all prepared for them without having to do anything themselves.

In this country, señor, there are as many kinds of strikes as there are bottles behind the bar there. There is the strike which comes when some clever stranger talks a great deal about nothing; that clever stranger usually disappearing when real trouble begins. Then there is the strike which comes when there has been much work and the men need time for a resting and for a spending of their money. For of what use is money, señor, if one has no time in which to spend it? Then there is the strike which is declared to help comrades of another trade, the strike of sympathy. This is the most common; it is but a dull month in which there are no strikes at all.

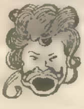
Rarest and most seldom seen, also most serious, is the strike which comes when the men are angered by a real injustice and start out to vent their anger. Then they become *fieras*—wild beasts. It was such a strike that that Mowbray brought on to himself; the first act of the men was to rip down the flag of *la compañia* which floated over the warehouse on the dock and tear it to pieces.

Yes, it is true that I am superintendent of the dock, but what can one man—even Enrique Machado who is known to be stronger than most—do against a mob? They are like children, those laborers, and it is useless to reason with an angry child. Even I may not do that.

Nothing more happened that day; except that a schooner came into Caimanítas that was bound for the place in Santo Domingo where *el Amo* desired to go. My heart was sad that he was going, but glad that he could see *la compañia* and that Mowbray was in such trouble when he left.

It was along the middle of the next morning, at about the hour when the shadow of the cathedral reaches no more than halfway to that first palm tree, when I heard a dull roaring from the direction of the docks. I was sitting in the office at the time and went outside with great haste; some such event had been to be expected. Mowbray had not only hired some Jamaicans that had come to cut cane, and put them working on the dock, but also he had armed some of them. Earlier in the morning there had been a clash between these men and some of the strikers; not a clash of great seriousness, but several of the strikers had been wounded. It is not well that a Jamaican should lay hands on a Cuban, and the anger of the laborers rose to the heat of fire against the man who had hired and armed these men. When I saw that mob coming along the street with a sullen roaring and a waving of machetes and knives, I knew that trouble was meant. Mowbray and the woman came around the corner just then, and when they saw him, the mob shouted loudly and began to run. They had been drinking much aguardiente and this had kept alive the flame of their anger. Mowbray and the woman immediately stepped into the office and slammed the door. After a moment of thought I turned and ran down the Street of San Rafael.

Was I afraid? Señor, it is very evident that in addition to being an *Americano*—and therefore mad—you are a stranger who knows nothing of Enrique Machado. I will not harm you, I will not even lay my hand upon you and my knife stays in its sheath. I might have killed you, I have killed for less more than once when I was young and hot-headed, but now that I am become older I can pass over such things now and then. Señor, listen with care. I ran because my first loyalty was to *el Amo*, and I wanted to tell him of this consummation of his revenge. I knew that the schooner was about ready to sail with him on board, and I desired to get the news to him before he left. The señor now understands my running, yes? *Bueno*, the thing is forgotten.



THE schooner was ready to sail and *el Amo* was walking down to her with his bags in his hand when I came. He walked slowly and I knew that there was grief in his heart, grief at leaving Caimanítas. Instead of receiving the news as any sane man would have done, instead of being pleased at this culmination of his revenge and ruination of his enemy, instead of smiling and thanking me as the bearer of good tidings, he stopped still and stared. It was then, señor, that the madness began to come upon O'Keefe.

"You say the mob is after Mowbray?" he inquired frowning.

"*Si, señor*, and they mean trouble."

"Why didn't you stay by him then?" he inquired roughly, with a scowl of even greater anger.

"It is that I was in haste to tell you, señor," I replied, striving to indicate injured feelings in my tone.

He grunted and dropped his bags down on to the ground, staring into the distance with an expression of great strangeness. I could not understand this strange anger where I had expected elation. Had I been in his place, señor, I would straightway have burned two candles to the good Santa Veronica for the greatness of my revenge; but even a philosopher may not understand the madness of you *Americanos*.

Thinking to bring *el Amo* to a realization of his good fortune by showing him how very badly things were going with Mowbray, I told him that the pale-haired woman was also in the office. This woman was the wife of his enemy; also I had seen them meet on the street and had seen the way he walked away from her. Was it not natural to suppose that it would please him to know that she also was in the hands of the mob? But it was not so, señor, it was not so. News of the plight of Mowbray had angered *el Amo*; news of the woman did more.

It was then, señor, that the madness fully came upon O'Keefe. At that moment, with the schooner for which he had been waiting all ready to sail, and with the company that had wronged him on the verge of ruin, with his enemy pursued by a mob; surely he should have been a happy man. As is the way of you *Americanos*, he chose the time of least expectedness for going mad.

El Amo dropped his bags there in the dust of the water-front street, although the captain of the schooner called that he was ready to sail and could not wait. With a wild light in his eye *el Amo* muttered something under his breath about not letting babes in the wood be murdered and looked around for a *fotingo*—a flivver, as you say. The only vehicle in sight was a small two-wheeled cart which was standing near-by with its mule asleep between the shafts. O'Keefe gripped me by the shoulder and pulled me over to the cart with him, and as soon as we had climbed on, he picked up the whip and began to belabor the mule with all his strength.

Has the señor seen those two-wheeled carts? Then he knows that there is little for holding on. We went down the street at a gallop, *el Amo* keeping his feet by some miracle and still wielding the whip; I bouncing around on the floor of the cart and nearly slipping off at every moment. The street along the docks is not paved and is of a great unevenness, so that after that ride my body was blue and yellow and even purple with great bruises for a week. Such carts do not have springs.

As we rode *el Amo* muttered to himself. I could not hear what he was saying, and thought that perhaps it was a prayer that he be in time to witness the tearing to pieces of his enemy; for I did not yet understand what he was going to do. We swung around the last corner on one of the cart's wheels and saw that the mob had reduced the heavy door of the office to a smallness resembling kindling wood and was even then dragging Mowbray and the woman along the street. *El Amo* uttered a great shout and drove our cart into the mob with the mule still going at full gallop. They scattered before us, though a few were knocked down, and O'Keefe stopped the cart beside the two frightened *Americanos* and jumped out. He moved his fists with that unbelievable swiftness that I had seen long ago in the warehouse, and the four men who had been holding the arms of Mowbray and the woman lay senseless on the ground.

Those stevedores are a slow-witted lot, señor, and they were still staring without comprehension as *el Amo* helped the *Americanos* on to the cart. The woman was bleeding from a small cut on the forehead. The mob awoke and came for O'Keefe then, but he shouted his mad war cry and struck down the first two with his swift-moving fists. He jumped on the cart and laid about him with his whip, striking men and the mule alike. As the cart leaped forward I myself relieved us of two men who had half climbed on, kicking their faces with my feet. See, señor, I wear the shoes of leather, as befits a superintendent of the docks. It was my unaided victory over those two men that made our escape possible. A few knives were thrown without effect, and then we had turned the corner and were away.

There is little more to tell, señor. I passed the office late that afternoon when all was quiet again, and saw that *el Amo* was within, picking up the scattered books and papers. I hesitated to go in, but he looked up and I saw that the madness had passed, that madness that had made him risk his life to save his enemy and spoil a God-given revenge. He said—

"Come in, Enrique; I thought I would just straighten the place up a little."

He said it without meeting my eye, and I who am a judge of men guessed that he was ashamed of having turned from a sane attitude of bitterness.

Just then the woman came into the office. O'Keefe straightened up slowly when he saw her, and that set look came over his face again. He glanced at me, and snapped out:

"*Vayase!*"

I went quickly, for I knew that tone in the voice of *el Amo*. However, señor, I did not go far, but listened at the door. Was it not my duty to know all possible of matters affecting my chief? I did no more than my duty.

The first few remarks I could not hear, for they spoke low and there was noise in the street, then I heard her say—

"At least you might let me thank you, John."

He did not answer, and after a little while she sighed and said—

"You are very unforgiving."

To this he replied—

"You were unforgiving once, Edith."

I remember their remarks word by word, señor, because I thought it my duty to do so. I am a slave to duty.

The woman then said:

"Here is a letter for you, John. It came some days ago, and Anthony hid it till your schooner should have sailed, but after this afternoon I made him give it to me."

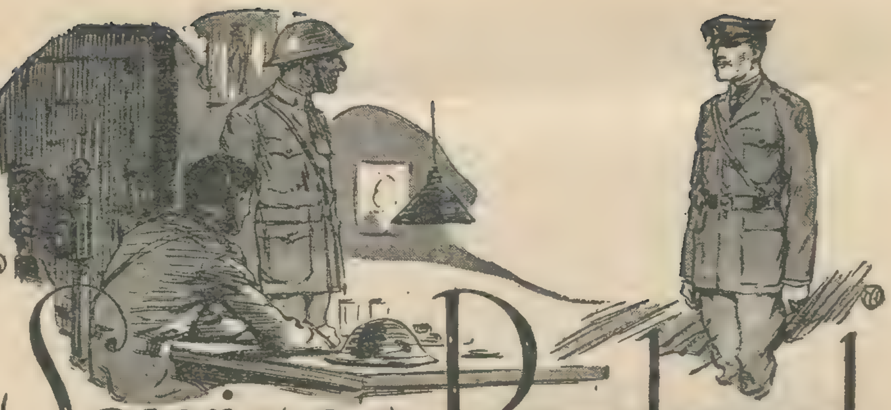
I heard a slight rustling sound, as though he had tossed the letter unread to the table, and then she said in that same tired voice:

"Better read it. It is from the home office, apologizing for the wrong done and reinstating you."

My heart leaped at this, señor, for it seemed to mean that *el Amo* was not to leave Caimanítas. The woman was still speaking:

"Don't think too hardly of Anthony for keeping the letter. This job meant a lot to him; and he had nothing to do with getting you in trouble. It was some dishonesty in the home office that one of the men tried to unload on to your shoulders." She started for the door then, and I had to move away quickly, for *el Amo* might have misunderstood my motives of loyal duty in listening at the door.

And that, señor, is the tale of the madness of John O'Keefe. You do not see the madness? *Por los santos clavos de Cristo*, surely no one but a madman would save his enemy from a mob! You say *you* can understand it? Then, señor, that only goes to prove what I said at the start—you *Americanos* are a mad race. And as I also said, it works to your own advantage, for it brought *el Amo* the good news that he was again local manager of *la compañia* in this city. That Mowbray and the woman returned to Habana and the north the next day. With O'Keefe again in charge, affairs quieted down, and all things were as before in Caimanítas. Which reminds me señor, that I am a working man as well as a philosopher and the hour of *almuerzo* is well past. The men of the docks do not work well without the watchful eye of Don Enrique Machado.



For Services Rendered

By Wilkeson O'Connell

THE door to the left of the bunk slammed shut violently; the whisky bottle spun on its convexed shoulder to the edge of the deal table, bounced, without breaking by some miracle, on to the rough boarding of the floor, and rolled coyly under an old, beautifully carved fifteenth century chair that had been looted from a duke's château. Seconds gathered themselves into minutes while the open-wired, green-shaded, electric light bulb swung in a narrowing spiral. It cast light successively upon the pictures of slim, half-nude French actresses, gross, more nude German ones, and various French and British shells and helmets that were thumb-tacked to the plank wall.

At last it hung at rest, revealing no more of the mural decorations than the group photograph of the Imperial Family which, canopied by the German colors, occupied the place of honor over the puffy, comfort-promising bunk. The other door was jerked open as violently as the first had been shut, and Lieutenant Tabor, E. C., U. S. A., entered the dugout.

He carried a revolver in one hand, was dirty, rather more than incipiently hirsute, fagged, hurried and excited; but the last condition was rapidly changing to its opposite. He glanced about him quickly but searchingly and called over his shoulder:

"This way, Middleton; the bird has flown, but come and look at the gilded cage!"

And he continued to contemplate the premises with contemptuous admiration till Captain Middleton of the British Forces appeared and paused on the threshold. The latter was in the same general condition as Tabor; but, more than that, an old, seamed scar ran from his chin nearly to his temple, bisected by a raw, red, shallow wound that still oozed moistly. Although both men were twenty-three years of age, there was no mistaking that Middleton was infinitely the senior.

"Half a moment there, Tabor," he suggested cautiously. "The recent tenant may have left a little surprize for us."

"Not he," said Tabor, proceeding with his investigations. "We're too close on their heels for any such dirty work. The thrifty duffer didn't even have time to turn off the light when he staged his getaway. What's here?" He stepped toward the door to the left. "The bath, I suppose, or maybe the billiard-room."

"Communication trench," said Middleton. "He made off that way, probably; but —— it, I'll follow him!"

He stretched out as comfortably as he could in the high-backed chair. Tabor closed the door to the communication trench, and leaned his back against it.

"Golly! Did you ever see such a palace?" he demanded. "Bachelor quarters with every luxury: Sun-parlor, sleeping-porch, hardwood floors, steam heat, electricity, gas, laundry and garage! While I, as good a Democrat with reservations as ever fought for safety, have been sloshing around for a fortnight past in Piccadilly Circus and eight inches of what would have been mud, if there hadn't been so much water in it! Call that justice?"

"Ye-e-es," drawled Middleton, who had seen many German trenches. "They always put themselves up rather well—Wonder how the others have come out. We kept touch on the right, but what happened to Clavering is beyond me. Thank God, we go no farther!"

"I noted firing to the left till just a little ago," said Tabor. "The line is solid I've no doubt. Fifteen miles in twenty-four hours—that will give the Hun something to cogitate upon!"

"Pity we arrived so soon," said Middleton, his eyes on the mess-kit that was laid symmetrically out upon the table. "Dinner would have been served in a bit; and —— knows I could have put it where it would have done the most good." He straightened up suddenly. "Now, what the —— were those tumblers for?"

Eagerly, searchingly, he looked about; but it was Tabor who spied the bottle under the ancient chair.

"Good rye whisky!" the American announced joyously, and raised the bottle against the light. "——'s fire! There's only enough for one stiff swig! We'll have to toss for it."

"Very well," said Middleton; "and likewise for the bed. I'd almost rather have that. It's weeks since I've seen as good, or been as fagged. Where's the infernal coin?"

High it spun, as Middleton called "heads," and then it tinkled softly upon an aluminum saucer.

"Yea, bo!" exulted Tabor. "The eagle screams again! But I'll make over all chances on the bed in compensation."

He poured out the liquor, added water from a looted carafe; but before he could raise the tumbler there was a knock at the door.

"Come in," bade Middleton, and a British soldier entered.

"Hofficer from 'eadquarters, sir," he reported, with a lop-sided salute. There were dull brown stains high up on the right side of his tunic.

"What! Already?" gasped Middleton, and he almost sat up.

"Oh, the ——!" said Tabor. "Here's how!" He gulped the toddy hastily as the soldier stepped back into the shadows and an immaculate staff officer took his place in the doorway.

"Captain Middleton and Lieutenant Tabor?"

Stiffly they admitted their identities. There was that in their more than naturally weary manner which subtly indicated that something was *not* cricket.

"I'm from the Corps Staff, gentlemen," said the S.O. stepping into the narrow chamber, "bringing, I fear, bad news to you. You've overstepped yourselves a bit, gentlemen, and must retreat at once to Neuville, in order to consolidate."

"Neuville!" exclaimed Middleton. "Why, that's five miles back!"

"Consolidate!" echoed Tabor. "Is there a general retreat on?"

The staff officer answered the implied criticisms coolly.

"We have received reliable information that there is to be a counter attack with fresh troops, at dawn. We will defend the Sonchy-Vardenois line; on which your station will be at Neuville."

"The Sonchy-Vardenois line!" exploded Middleton. "It's indefensible! And with men who have not stopped to eat for fourteen hours past! You might as well hand the whole shooting match over to the enemy at once, sir."

"Also, you will find replacements at Neuville," said the S. O., soothingly. There was a pause while Middleton groped through a mind too weary to function, and Tabor stared with unwinking steadiness at the glorious Mercury of what powers there were.

"This," said Middleton, at last, very slowly and very frankly, "indubitably is the most incomprehensible order that even the General Staff has ever sent out! The enemy in full retreat; ourselves—" with a glance at the bunk—"in a—desirable—position—and then ordered to fall back to an untenable line!"

"You are mistaken, sir," the S. O.'s tone was crisper. "The enemy is not in full retreat; and you have no support on either side." Quickly he caught Middleton's nervous flicker, and then went sharply on—"Also, the defensibility of the Sonchy-Vardenois line is for the General staff to decide."

"BUT —— it all!" answered Middleton, peevishly. "You're asking me to defend it! And I can't, I tell you! I can't! My men are completely played out; they could no more retreat to Neuville, now, than advance the same distance. Besides—I *am* supported on the right."

"But not on the left, also?" asked the S. O. quickly.

"Well," hesitated Middleton, "I don't quite know. We've heard firing."

"You are not supported on the left, sir," said the S. O. with finality. "Also, your right was driven in half an hour ago. Also, I presume the orders of the General Staff are still to be obeyed!"

There was a knock at the door, and Tabor quietly passed the others to answer. But even while he listened and replied to the whispered communication of the soldier in the shadows, he kept a look of frowning intensity fixed on the staff officer. Middleton leaned, stiff-armed, upon the table, and spoke with an obvious effort.

"I can't," he said, unsteadily, "I can't—make it—out."

"Of course, Captain," commiserated the visitor, "I realize that this must be a fearful blow to you. Also, that you have had a tiresome day; and also that it must seem hard to have wasted so much effort—but—well—the fortunes of war, you know."

"Oh, yes," said Middleton his arms trembling with the pressure he put upon them. "So much effort, as you say. ——, how they cut into us at the lower crossroads! And wasted—yes, quite, quite wasted." He laughed weakly. "I wish I—was on the staff."

"Believe me, Captain," said the S. O. with sympathetic, forgiving earnestness, "we, also, are deeply grieved to take this step; but you know the proverb about making haste slowly. If it were not for the best—"

Tabor closed the door, and passing to Middleton, whispered in his ear. The latter jerked up to face his coadjutor dazedly.

"Eh—*what?*" he demanded.

Tabor, in the same tone as before, repeated his statement.

"Oh, come off!" protested Middleton, not realizing that he spoke aloud. "Of course, he's pukkah! Why he must be—he's such an ass!"

"True enough," admitted Tabor. "But Clavering has—" And the rest was sunk in a whisper which was again received in dazed amazement.

"Eh—*wh-a-t!*" Middleton dully repeated; and then, with a heart-breaking effort, he pulled himself out of his fatigue.

"May I ask, gentlemen," stiffly inquired the staff officer, "when you intend to obey the order that I have conveyed to you?"

A look and a nod passed between the British captain and his American coadjutor; whereupon Tabor, as if he had received a command, wheeled and left the dugout. He returned before Middleton had finished replying to the S. O.'s demand.

"Frankly, sir," said Middleton, "I do not intend to obey that order. The word was passed a moment since that the line is consolidated on this front from Evron to Antraine; and—and—and—I should like to see your credentials, sir."

"My credentials!" The jaw dropped, and then snapped shut like a trap. "Good ——, what an outrage! What do you take me for?"

Tabor's eyes slid from the small, blond mustache to the tiny, useless spurs, and up again.

"A German," he said, coolly.

"A—German!" gasped the S. O. "Wh—what—" then he laughed. "Oh, ho, ho, ha, ha! That's good—that's really good, you know! Why, I'm Frank Rodinhope—of Rodin Hall in Kent. Everybody knows me, al—" Tabor looked up sharply at the monosyllable; and the rest of the speech was directed to him—"though *you* may not, sir!"

The implication was that Tabor was a rank outsider, and a barbarian to boot; which that young man received with a glance of positive, if disturbing, admiration at the speaker, followed by a look of inquiry to Middleton. After all, the uniform was a British one; and the latter ranking officer concerned. Tabor held his peace.

"Then, of course," Middleton hinted, uneasily, "you won't object to showing—"

"Well, well," conceded the S. O., tolerantly, "one should not attempt to argue with madmen or children; and after fourteen hours one is a bit of both, as well I know. You'll hardly expect me to produce my commission—" feeling in an inside pocket—"but maybe these papers will be as convincing."

He handed them to Middleton, who turned them rapidly, humming and muttering as he read.

"Hm, hm—S. O. No. 2,275,428—Captain Francis Rodinhope—leave for ten days—Captain hm, hm—cited—Major Rodinhope—hm, hm—report to—order revoked—hm, hm, hm." A pucker appeared between his brows. "—— it all, Tabor, we've made a mistake!"

"A very nasty one, gentlemen," said the staff officer, cool in his turn. "Also, one which you will find difficult to explain—I can promise you that."

"Then what the —— is the meaning of that order he's trying to pass?" demanded Tabor. "Of course, he isn't going to hand out any incriminating evidence. He'll have to be searched."

White crept around the nostrils of the S. O.

"Be careful, sir," he said, dangerously. "Be careful how you proceed in your insolence. I have been patient under it so far, out of consideration for your fatigue, but if this continues, it shall tell heavily against you at headquarters—tell heavily against you, believe me."

Middleton began to pace the floor nervously; four strides east, wheel, and four west again. Tabor, ignoring the S. O. and his threat alike, spoke exclusively to his immediate superior.

"I'll take the responsibility, if you like," he offered.

"I—I wish—I wish I knew—" Middleton halted in an agony of indecision. All the hard-won Allied Line oppressed him on one side; the fear of an adverse report from a disobeyed, insulted, and righteously indignant senior turned the other cold. He might, conceivably, be broke for it. He was too tired to think; and suddenly his mouth worked ominously.

"Only way to do is to find out," said Tabor. "It's six of one and half a dozen of the other, any way you put it. If he *is* pukkah, and we don't search him, it's his bounden duty to turn in the —— of a report for gross negligence and endangering the line. I'd be broke for that, if you weren't—Black Jack's most as fussy about espionage as millinery. On the other hand, if this bird isn't O. K— But it's a toss as I said before."

"Yes, yes," said Middleton, concentrating all his waning energy on his struggle for self-control so that he hardly knew what he was saying, much less what construction might be put upon his words. "Yes, yes—that is so."

Tabor seized this as an assent, and blew a whistle sharply; whereupon an American sergeant and two soldiers entered so promptly that they must have been stationed and waiting, directly behind the door.

"Eh?" said Middleton, as if he had not expected as much. The staff officer gasped and turned green, but Tabor did not pause for further comment.

"Search this man, Sergeant Mallory," he ordered, briskly.

"This—this staff officer, sor?" demanded the non-com, in pleased amazement. "Go to ut, bhoys!"

"B-By ——, you shall p-pay for this!" stammered the S. O., as one soldier stripped him of his tunic, while the other went through his breeches pockets. They worked with a certain weary enthusiasm; for the British Staff was no more popular with the enlisted personnel of either army than with the regimental officers. As they drew article after article from the bellows pockets, they handed each to the sergeant, who laid it upon the table. Tabor ticked off:

"Pocket-knife, collapsible cup, key-ring, bill-folder, purse, first-aid kit—just look those last three over, will you, Middleton?—iron-ration, flash-light, chocolate, matches, watch, Colt, flask, cartridges fags, and a handkerchief. Is that quite all, Sergeant?" The sarcasm of his tone was even deeper than when he had first perceived the luxury of a German dugout.

"And this, sor," said the sergeant, handing him a small, leather-bound, metal-clasped book.

"A diary?" said Tabor.

"It is," said the S. O., grimly. "And if you're any sort of a gentleman, you'll leave it unopened."

He watched narrowly; as Tabor promptly broke the little lock, and riffled through the pages.

"Hmpt!" was the comment. "Rather a full and particular affair. "July 8, ten days leave—Park Lane—Moira Monteagle,——of a row—September—inspection—Nice—got it hot—Christmas at Lamartine—slightly scratched — Monteagle goes west — '17—Betty Blair—the Hall—May Drive——colonel—Rodin—Aunt Aggie drops off—"

Tabor let his hand fall, the book between his fingers, while he stared studyingly at nothing on the opposite wall.

"Hmpt!" As if to verify some conclusion to which his meditations had led him, he raised the diary but Middleton stopped him from further investigation.

"Don't," he said, nervously. "Don't go on reading it, Tabor. There's nothing there—nor here either," with a glance at the littered table.

"On the contrary," snapped the S. O., "there's a lot there—most of it marked with my crest if you want additional evidence."

"DON'T you get it yet?" said Tabor to Middleton. "Francis Rodinhope is dead, or a prisoner; and this Hun, who was probably educated at one of the big English public schools, where he possibly knew Rodinhope, is standing in his shoes, using his name, and position—not to mention his crest and pocket handkerchief—for obvious purposes."

"But, —— it all, man!" wailed the S. O. very Britishly. "Don't you *see* that I'm not dead or a prisoner?"

"It sounds deucedly plausible, Tabor," said Middleton, "but you haven't one grain of proof."

Tabor ignored them both.

"If it weren't for my accent, I could work it myself, with a record like this," rapping the diary, "to guide me. Is that absolutely all, Sergeant?"

"Yes, sor; above the belt. Shall we take his boots off?"

"There's something around his neck, sir," said one of the soldiers.

The S. O. turned a deadly white.

"A scapular, sir," he said to Middleton. "The Rodinhopes are a Catholic family. Is—is nothing sacred?"

"Don't, Tabor!" exclaimed Middleton. "We—we really are—"

"Take it off, Perkins," ordered the American, grimly; and the soldier obeyed.

The S. O. groped out a hand, blindly grasping the arm of the sergeant while Tabor opened the little bag, and shook out something that fell with a clink into one of the mess-kit plates. Five men stared dully, stupidly at the tin in which lay a little piece of iron that would weigh heavier than a man's life. Suddenly, Middleton was concious of hard drawn, gasping intakes in the silence among them, and breathed himself again. Tabor still looked at the plate with dazed, unwinking eyes. At last he moved, and there was a heart- and nerve-wracking pause while the officers consulted each other telepathically. The German slithered down on the bunk and Middleton addressed him reluctantly, but with no uncertainty.

"You have been taken, in our lines, in the uniform and with the arms of a British officer. Of course, you understand what this means?"

There was no answer. The spy sat bent over, his elbows leaned upon his knees, his hands dangling between them, making futile, aimless motions.

"It—it isn't our fault," said Tabor, suddenly boyish. The effect of the whisky was fading; and his eyes were nearly as heavy as Middleton's. He too was going on his nerve alone, again.

Middleton hesitated, looked at the German and, going to the table, picked up the automatic that had once belonged to Francis Rodinhope. Very conspicuously he "broke" it, looked again at the spy who was following him with a strained attention and then slowly slipped a single cartridge into the chamber before he laid it by the mess-kit plate.

"I—I'm sorry we've no chaplain with us," said Middleton. "Ours was killed this morning."

The German pulled himself together, and rose to his feet.

"It doesn't matter," he said, with a queer, confident indifference. "There is little to be counted against me."

"There may be one or two things there," said Middleton, with a glance at the table, "that you would like to take with you."

The German leaned forward, picked up the Cross, and then the automatic.

"I thank you," he said to Middleton.

Tabor stepped back; the sergeant opened the door and, in obedience to a motioned command, the enlisted men passed through it. No order, no request, no suggestion was offered to the spy. They waited and, after one wistful glance about him, he turned toward the shadowy exit. As he did so, his eye lighted on the picture under the Prussian colors, and he stiffened into a salute.

"Cæsar," began Middleton, mechanically, somnambulantly, drunk with fatigue, "we, who are—"

"Shut up!" said Tabor, his mouth, like his shoulders, twitching.

At the door the German hesitated, turned, looked from Middleton to Tabor, and again saluted. Surprize flashed between the allied officers; then each, after the custom of his service, returned the courtesy and stood at a rigid attention until the sergeant had drawn the door completely closed.

Tabor dropped limply into the ancient chair.

"Ch-ch-chow?" Then he answered himself. "——, but I'm too tired to eat!" He fished out a bootjack from under the table. "Will you be using all those comforters?"

Middleton stripped a down quilt from the bed.

"Here you are," he said. "Chuck over that jack when you're finished with it."

Tabor did so. Middleton paused with his heel in the crotch.

"You know," he considered, "that chap didn't take such a fearfully long chance. He could have passed me easily."

"And that order, too?"

"Yes, and that order, too. I've saved my skin by obeying worse—often. But what the deuce started your suspicions?"

Tabor rolled up in the quilt on the floor.

"Hm-m-m-m-m-m, hm, hm, hm—hm!" he hummed in drowsy relaxation. "Oh, yes! Way he slung those 'alsos.' I went to school with a German kid in St. Louis, who talked just like that. No accent, just an 'also' stuck in at every possible place. We used to razz him about it. And the whisky pepped me up enough to concentrate, I reckon."

Middleton continued his debating.

"Wonder why he carried the Cross with him? Wonder what school he went to? Wonder how he could do it? ——! *What* a bed! But the odds were a hundred to one—a thousand to one!—against his being searched—and spotted. Yet, he lost!" He slept for half a minute, and woke with a jerk of fatigue.

"Golly! Just suppose he hadn't!"

A shot near-by broke the silence, but there was no one in the dugout awake to hear it.

THE ANCIENT MEDITERRANEAN

by G. E. H.

ACCORDING to a very ancient Moorish historian, Idreesi by name, the Mediterranean was, in times of recorded history, an inland sea, lacking the twelve-mile-wide Straits of Gibraltar which now connect it with the Atlantic Ocean. Idreesi's statement is that, while the continents of Africa and Europe were thus connected, the peoples of Morocco and Spain were continually at war, Until Alexander ordered a canal to be dug between the two seas. This canal was twelve miles long and six miles wide—which must have been quite an engineering feat even for those days—but the rush of the tides later widened it to its present size.

Another Moorish historian, Abd-ul-Wahid who lived in the time of William Rufus of England, writes that records available to him told of a bridge which had been built across the Straits by the Romans, and said that in calm weather the remains of this bridge could be seen in the Straits near Tarifa. Abd-ul-Wahid, by the way, has a great claim to our confidence in what he writes, for his writings contain the statement that from the Straits of Gibraltar "the country turns toward the south, to arrive at Abyssinia and India—" a fact which Europe was not to even suspect until a very long time later.

Another explanation of the Straits of Gibraltar is that they were the result of a convulsion of nature, which separated the continents, and in support of this theory, there is visible near Tangier a semicircular amphitheater, cut in the solid rock of the coast, while directly opposite it, upon the Spanish coast, is a similar one, each appearing to be one-half of a circular amphitheater torn apart by an earth convulsion. A more probable, although less dramatic, explanation, is that they were really two separate semicircular amphitheaters; and still another is that they were Phœnician burying-grounds, where the dead were laid upon stone shelves, like benches, and then covered. I have seen a number of Phœnician graves in Morocco which would indicate that this might be the case.

As for the Straits, Hamo, the Carthaginian, found them there five hundred years B. C. and beyond that saw the Atlantic.

Days of '49

A Six-Part Story Part IV

"—the days of old,
The days of gold,
The days of '49."

By Gordon Young

Author of "Pearl-Hunger," "LaRue of the 88," etc.

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form

INTO the town of San Francisco one July noon in the year 1849 rode Dick Hales, ex-Texas Ranger.

"Where can I find Hubert Lee?" was the question he put to the miners and hawkers in the street.

But Lee was out of town.

As Hales sat on his horse looking about at the people and the town, gold mad, drunken, lecherous, shoddy, he heard cries of—"Out of the way, we're Hounds. Hounds are coming," and a party of horsemen led by the infamous and beautiful Dona Elvira Eton rode up to him.

One, Jerry Fletcher, thinking him a Spaniard from his sombrero, lifted his whip, crying—

"Out of the way, greaser."

Hales dragged him from his horse and stood over him, menacing.

"Let that man go, señor," said Elvira.

"Take your carrion," said Hales, "where can I find Hubert Lee?"

Dona Elvira did not know. Hubert Lee was to her but a name, although she knew his arch enemy, the blustering and prominent Col. Nevinson, very well. She asked Hales his name.

"Hales?" she said, "I have heard that name before."

Noticing a sudden flicker of interest in Hales' eye she tried to pump him as to whom he sought in reality, but he finding that she had no information useful to him, deserted her for the horse market.

There he sold his horse for two hundred dollars and repaired to the Magnolia, a saloon and gambling den run by Monsieur Max. There day and night, apparently never sleeping, sat Stewart Dawes, the gambler.

Hales walked up to him.

"Deal," he said.

He won three times his two hundred and left with a promise to return.

AT THAT moment a ship was docking at the wharf. It was from the Atlantic, and, although it would soon be deserted to the scavengers to convert into rooming-house, saloon, or brothel, its arrival was an event, for it brought the great new mirror that was to adorn the Magnolia, and Mr. Tesla, a gentleman representative of a gambling syndicate, who intended to buy the place from M. Max. With Tesla came his daughter Ilona, and Kredra her Basque serving maid, who considered herself a seeress. On this ship also came John Taylor, a young lawyer, and Martin O'Day, a little cockney in search of gold.

Taylor, by luck, got into partnership with Judge Deering, a champion of law and order in a city of bandits.

The little cockney went to the Magnolia where he was immediately treated to the sight of Stewart Dawes shooting a card sharper. Soon he found himself talking to Hubert Lee who had just arrived from the mines. Lee told him that before he could be a miner he needed five hundred dollars' worth of outfit and a partner.

Just then Lee was whisked off by a friend who told him that Col. Nevinson was trying to outdo him in a business deal, and O'Day bumped into a large, good-natured, drunken miner. After some talk these two agreed to become partners and went off to the room of Bill Burton, the miner. But Burton had no money and O'Day was at a loss to know where it was coming from. That night he stole out of the room, filled a bag with street dust and washers and went back to the Magnolia.

As he entered there was a report and a flash. When the crowd separated Hubert Lee lay dead on the floor and Nevinson stood over him with a smoking revolver. Beside him stood the cadaverous Bruce Brace, a member of the cowardly society of Hounds and his constant bodyguard.

O'Day walked up to the table of Dawes. There

"Days of '49," copyright, 1925, by Gordon Young.

Dawes was arguing with a young Spaniard, José de Sola.

"Change your bet," said Dawes.

"Señor, I weel not," said José and Dawes found himself looking into the barrel of a gun. He dealt to the Spaniard and the little cockney, who had crept up and laid his bag on the tray. O'Day won and crept back to his room.

IN THE meantime Nevinson was at the house of Dona Elvira, telling her about his fight with Lee. But she was not interested. This strange iron-faced stranger, Hales, interested her and she wished to find out who it was that Lee knew and Hales wanted. If she could find out she would enlist Ferdinand, a homeless singing vagabond, whose life she had once saved, and who was, therefore, her devoted slave, to draw Hales into an entanglement with her.

She discovered that there was an Anna Hales who had followed the colonel to California. What relation to Hales she was the colonel did not know, but this woman had fallen so low that she now lived in the infested slum, drinking and debauching herself in every way.

Elvira smiled and held her peace.

When the colonel had gone—

"Put me to bed early, Tota," she said to her maid. "I must be fresh tomorrow, for I have many things to do."

BURTON and O'Day were just coming from breakfast with their new wealth when they heard a baby crying. They entered the house from which the sound came. There lay a preacher, his wife and baby, all sick and starving.

"How much better to get wisdom than gold," moaned the preacher.

"Ma'am," said Burton to the wife, "Here's some money; an' we'll get some folks up here ta help ya pretty soon."

He ducked backward and out, and hurried off toward the center of the town, the Plaza.

"There's a parson an' his wife an' baby starvin' back there," cried Burton when he arrived.

The miners gathered round anxious to give money for their help. Thus Ezekiel Preble and his family were helped back to health by the miners, and Preble started about the city denouncing sin.

IN THE Magnolia, Hales stood by José de Sola at the Dawes table. Hales and the Spaniard were friends. Though Hales had fought in the Mexican war he had lived in California for many years and had learned to like Spaniards. Hales had once stopped, when traveling, at the rancho of José's sweetheart. He had spoken a good word for José to the girl's hostile parents, and had later traded a horse from the young Spaniard for a fine revolver. He was now trying to buy or win this back, without success.

Having failed, he turned to the gambling table.

"I'll tap your bank," he said to Dawes.

He won, leaving Dawes bankrupt. Hales offered to bet the whole thing on one card if the Magnolia would bank its game. Dawes walked off. He returned with Ilona Tesla, who in the absence of her father, the Magnolia's new proprietor, was prepared to take the responsibility. Hales won.

"I'll play it all," he said.

But just then Tesla hurried on the scene to drag his daughter away. With him came Col. Nevinson; Tesla just returned in time to prevent a gun-fight between Nevinson and Hales and José, the two latter, the colonel said, having insulted him.

"Be here at one o'clock and I will have the money for you," said Tesla to Hales.

When he was alone, a negro boy brought him a note from Dona Elvira saying that she had news for him. He waited on her at her apartments. She talked vaguely with him, trying to gain information about Anna Hales, his sister, as he said. But *he* forced the information that she had sunk to the lowest part of the Spanish quarter, out of Elvira, and then he left. When he had gone Elvira called her servant and told him to find Anna Hales.

Hales went to the Magnolia for his money. There he met Tesla and told him that José was ready for a fight with any gringo he might see, because his brother, Don Esteban had recently had a lot of miners steal his horse and whip him. Don Esteban's friends and relatives, especially José and Don Gil Diego, were out to find the culprits, and would not rest until they had succeeded.

When Tesla had gone, Dawes came up to Hales and asked for a loan, implying that he had cheated on the deal to make Hales win from the Magnolia. Hales knocked the furious gambler down and went to return the money to Tesla.

Tesla was telling his daughter of a ranch of Col. Nevinson's, El Crucifijo, to which he was taking her out of the city.

That night Hales stood at the bar.

"Turn around, Mr. Hales," said the bartender without looking up.

Hales whirled about; his gun blazed three times. Other guns spoke.

When the smoke had cleared Hales and José were standing over several dead Hounds who had been killed in their attempt to assassinate Hales.

José had killed Bruce Brace and Jerry Fletcher.

Next day Anna Hales was brought to Dona Elvira Eton. She was drunk and helpless. Under the scheming talk of Elvira she seemed to repent of her old ways.

At the same time Hales, on the portico of the Parker House, was trying to persuade José to come with him to the mountains to help the travelers into California.

"No, señor," said José, "I must catch the men who took Don Esteban's horse."

"Be sure to kill the right men," said Hales.

"Kill?" said José. "A dead horse does not feel the branding iron. They will live until God blesses them with death. *Mediante Dios!*"

AS JOSÉ sat there, Benito, a servant of his family's, passed by. José joined him. He and Benito rode off toward the Cowden rancho, El Crucifijo, to join Elvira's servant Ferdinand. This ranch was the same ranch to which Ilona Tesla had gone. It belonged to Col. Nevinson, but was claimed by Elvira and Ferdinand.

AT THE same moment Col. Nevinson, Ilona, her father and Kredra were arriving at El Crucifijo. Here lived Ferdinand and Pedro, a boy devoted to him. Ferdinand talked to the amusement of all but the colonel until he heard Kredra swearing in Basque. He rushed into the kitchen.

"You are one of my people," he cried, "I have not heard my own tongue since my vengeance of twenty years ago exiled me. Who is this girl?"

"She is a granddaughter of the benefactors of our people, the de Ruz family."

Thus Ferdinand became Ilona's slave.

The colonel called for a horse named Prince, about whom there was some mystery and who bore the de Sola brand, and rode off. With him rode Mr. Tesla and the colonel started to propose for the hand of his daughter in marriage. Interruptions forced their arrival in San Francisco with the question unspoken.

That afternoon Col. Nevinson went into Baer's saloon. The Hounds, for revenge on account of José's part in the saloon fight, were cleaning all the Spaniards out of the city. A man named Tucks sent for the colonel. He was groaning with pain and showed the colonel where the de Solas had branded him, for he was one of those who had stolen Don Esteban's horse. The Hounds rushed forth to kill all Mexicans.

In the Magnolia, Hales was asking Judge Deering to find and care for his wayward sister. Mr. Tesla was talking to them. A shot, obviously meant for Hales came through the door. It hit Tesla. He fell down dead.

Hales and John Taylor, Anna Hales' younger brother, rode to inform Ilona.

She, Ferdinand and Kredra rode to the city.

"Who did it?" said Ferdinand.

"That gambler Dawes," said Kredra, an occult glint in her eye.

Ferdinand went to Dawes' room, but Dawes was gone.

After hearing the sad news, and quarrelling again with Hales the colonel went to see Elvira. She insulted Ilona and he struck her and left her to nurse a vicious hate for him.

He found the city sick of bloodshed and arresting the Hounds who had murdered the Spaniards. He heard Judge Deering refuse to allow them to be hanged without trial. A committee of men went to arrest the colonel as a man identified with the Hounds. He took them to see Tucks' wounds and they released him as justified.

Elvira sent for Ferdinand.

"Apple of the Gibbet," she said, "why didn't you tell me that Col. Nevinson had a woman at my *rancho*."

"My *rancho*, you mean," answered he. "Because from now on I am my own man. No longer shall I dance at your word. I have served you long enough."

Elvira was furious.

Then the door opened, and Hales stood there.

FERDINAND, with the movement of a wild animal unexpectedly approached from behind, turned and faced Hales searchingly, looked at him from toes to head He recognized Hales as the horseman who had come for Ilona, but before had seen him only in the night-light; now he stared into Hales' face and read it with the sure and literal knowledge of a man who, all the world over, had lived by his wits, and continued many times to live only because he could read the faces of men. Ferdinand saw in the length of a two-second glance that this man was dangerous, less evil than most, one that would stand no trifling, one who spoke straight words.

Hales in turn hardly glanced at him. With distrust and no gallantry he looked at Elvira—

"Madam, *now* what is it you want?"

Dona Elvira drew herself up with the hauteur of one who is wrongly injured, but answered as if nevertheless she knew that forgiveness would be asked, and given—

"Anna Hales is here!"

Hales glanced about, not sure that he believed, even now.

"She *is* here, señor! I will show you. I found her. I brought her here. I am giving her all the care this city affords. Oh, and you should hear her tell of that man, how he drew her from you, lied about you, won her—brought her to this city, beat her, threw her aside, threw her into the street, till she dropped so low that she took the name of Ragged Mag! I found her on the waterfront—in the Red Lamb!"

Elvira sensed that even now he was still more incredulous than angered by the recital of Anna's wrongs. Exasperated by the feeling that she could not move, stir, awaken, enrage this man, she cried:

"Look, señor! Look—upon my cheek! See! *He* did this! *He*, the man you seek! When he found what I had done for her, this very day he struck me! Came here, beat me! Col. Nevinson, señor, is the man who wronged you—and he did this to me!"

"Nevinson? He did!" And at that moment Hales' low voice had in it the sound that she had ached to hear.

"Yes, yes, señor!" she answered with lowered tone, but with increase of bitterness. "Come here, señor. She is here—dying. I will show you!"

Dona Elvira, with the light step and tense hush of manner that befits one who encroaches where Death sits at the feast, went to the door, opened it gently, pushed it wide.

"There!" said Elvira in a whisper, pointing toward the thin hungry face that seemed covered with parchment, stained with a fever-glow; and the fever, the better to eat her up, kept her unconscious.

"There," said Elvira, as Hales with noiseless slowness went closer, stooping slightly to the unfamiliar features where hardly a trace of the woman he had known remained, "there is your wife! And Col. Nevinson is the man that ruined her! The man you came to find in this city!"

Hales straightened up and turned sharply, peering from under a puzzled frown at the Dona Elvira, now darkly triumphant.

"My wife!"

"Yes! Señora Hales has told me all—" But a confused fear trembled through Elvira as she looked into his face. "Isn't this the woman? Isn't this Anna Hales?"

"Yes. And—" deliberately, coldly, looking hard at Elvira with a deepening of suspicion—"and I begin to see what you are up to, but—"

"This isn't your wife?"

"My wife! *No.* She is not my wife. I said she was my sister. She was my brother's wife—and in her shame and wretchedness I would not disown her!"

"Oh *dios dios!*" said Elvira weakly, putting a hand to her face, looking at him stupidly as a spider may look at a man who has walked through the web.

"I will make arrangements at once, within a few minutes, to have this poor unfortunate removed, since your charity has in it so much that is uncharitable. And, madam, I begin to understand many things. If you are so anxious to have Col. Nevinson killed, you will have to kill him yourself. I will not do it for you!"

As Hales walked from the room without another word or glance, she roused herself, pointed after him, shouted wildly—

"Coward! You coward!"

With a bang she shut the door of the sick room and looked about with breathless fury, like one who searches for any weapon; then came at Ferdinand, seized him, held him with one hand while a finger of the other touched the bruise of her cheek—

"You, Ferdinand! Go—tell the de Solas! Tell *them!* It is Nevinson they want! It is he they want! They will come right into the city after him! Oh I know Spanish blood! Ferdinand, go! Tell them that—"

XXXII

THE city that had arisen in wrath and with cries of "To the Rope! Rope!" seized a large number of the Hounds, then, to the mystification of historians, whatever their conjectures, tried these rascals with tolerance, sentenced them to inconsequential punishments, and, excepting upon a few who were deported, neglected to enforce even these mild sentences.

This first swarming of the men who were afterward to be the Vigilantes, passed almost as rapidly as it had gathered; and, some three weeks later, the newly elected Alcalde, Col. John W. Geary, addressed the following statement to the city council;

> "—we are without a dollar in the public treasury, and it is to be feared the city is greatly in debt. You have neither an office for your magistrate nor any other public edifice. You are without a single police officer or watchman, and you have not the means of confining a prisoner for an hour; neither have you a place to shelter while living, sick and unfortunate strangers who may be cast upon our shores, or to bury them when dead. Public improvements are unknown in San Francisco. In short, you are without a single requisite necessary for the promotion of prosperity, for the protection of property, or for the maintenance of order—"

But nevertheless at this time, in this wild city, the Baptists and Catholics had erected churches; the Mormons met in the school house on the Plaza, the Presbyterians, the Methodists and Congregationalists were building or preparing to build houses of worship.

And the Hounds, though there were no policemen, had fled. Mostly they scattered among mining camps where many of them, with an ease that must have astonished their simple minds after the long lawless impudence with which they pestered San Francisco, succeeded in getting themselves hanged.

BOOK II:

I

THE miners, wherever they paused to dig, gave the place a name; and though often credited to Bret Harte's imagination, Red Dog and Poker Flat were real camps; as were Jackass Gulch, Chuckle-Head Diggings, Bogus Thunder, Git-You-Up-and-Git, Puppytown, and Shirttail Cañon.

Ragtown was appropriately so-called, every shelter in it being made from abandoned wagon covers or scraps of tents. Hangtown, Murderer's Bar, Dead Man's Bar were names that held the authentic echo of tragedy.

One very rich camp got its name of "Nigger Hill" characteristically: A greenhorn negro appeared one day in a river camp and began digging. "Get to —— out of here," a miner told him. "You're on my claim." He tried another spot and was again warned off. "But boss, where can I dig?" "See the top o' that hill? Go up there, you black rascal, and dig all you want." The negro went; and, to the amazement of the river miners who soon hurried up after him, there was gold on that remote hilltop.

Each camp made its own laws, regulating the size of the claims and amount of work needful to hold possession. The discoverer was always given first choice—being the discoverer he usually had already taken it—and sometimes two or more claims. A pick or shovel left on a claim was an inviolable symbol of authority. Men were whipped for moving such tools, hanged for stealing them.

When a miner sold a claim the verbal conveyance was sufficient, for men were honest and their word was good.

Theft was punished more readily and as severely as murder, for property could not defend itself; and in '51 the law of the State permitted the death penalty for grand larceny.

A sympathetic historian of the miners has written:

A stormy life ebbed through the typical camps of '49. Each man carried a buckskin bag of gold dust; it passed as currency at a dollar a pinch. Each went armed and felt able to protect himself. They mined, traded, gambled, fought, discussed camp affairs; they paid fifty cents a drink for their whisky, and fifty dollars a barrel for their flour, and, at times, thirty dollars apiece for butcher knives with which to pick gold from rock crevices. Saloons and gambling houses lined the streets.

The mining camps were more amazing than even San Francisco; for here they were, pitched in the utter wilderness, reached by roads little better than foot trails, filled with men who appeared bursting with lusty life.

They were not unlike Titans, or at least the sons of Titans; all were young, for only youth could fight its way over the plains, deserts, mountains, or endure the hardships of a miner's life; all were shaggy and bearded for the razor was almost unknown among them; they were full of robust mischief, reckless, generous, indomitable and dangerously short-tempered if anything wasn't "just right."

It seemed that there was no moderation, no shading, in their qualities or fortune; men who got sick, got well quickly, died or slunk off to cities; men were lucky or wretched—and storekeepers gave such bountiful credit to strangers that no man went hungry; they seemed very drunk or grimly sober, for their work was serious and hard, and when they relaxed into good-humor mischief they played with the recklessness of drunken men whether or not they had been drinking.

The real character came to view in that rough-and-tumble life; all worked hard; all had equal rights; weaklings died and rascals were hanged, so for a short time the mining camps were the most honest, robust and hardworking communites anywhere in the world. But the saloons keepers, the loafers, called bummers, the blackleg gamblers that crept in, were, many of them, from the very first of the vulturous type that, as much as they dared, aroused the worst passions of the miners at their weakest moments and gratified them with low women and carousal.

Nothing could check the blows of the miners to get at gold; they burrowed into hills like gophers—coyoting they called it then, gophering it is called now; they dug pits sixty feet deep to get at the bed rock; and flood came before they scraped the rock they lifted rivers, and with only pick and shovel, no explosives, tore down the faces of mountains.

Some men worked for days without finding even the color, though other men almost at their elbows were growing rich; some washed out $1500 in one panful of dirt; others pulled bunches of grass from gulches and hill-sides, shaking the gold from the roots into buckets, and one miner gathered $16,000 thus in five weeks, another, with pick and pan, took out $18,000 in one day.

A persistently lucky man of that day was one Clarke, who discovered Rich Diggings, from which millions were taken. He knew nothing of mining, but would get drunk, and while drunk he wandered off to the places where a sober man would least expect to find gold. Truck gardeners discovered gold at the roots of their cabbages; a drunken sailor fell at night into a ravine and awakened the next morning with his hand on a nugget; a man digging a grave uncovered a nugget; and near Sonora the funeral was interrupted by a man who, kneeling in the midst of prayer, idly examined the fresh earth at the grave's edge, then cried, "Gold!" The body was moved aside and the mourners staked out claims.

Nothing was sacred. All rights were subject to the claims of the miner. Entire towns were moved aside and every inch of soil on which the towns had stood, from grass roots to bedrock, was sluiced away. The very streets of Placerville were mined. A wag once "salted" the streets of Yreka and part of the town was overturned and staked off before the joke was discovered.

The early mining camps had hardly more stability than a shadow on the ground. At the faintest echo of "Gold!" men came as if the wind had carried the word, often leaving their own rich diggings for those that echo said were richer. At times as many as five thousand miners stampeded almost overnight from one section to another.

Large numbers of miners sought the fantom of the mother lode, refusing to stay long in any of the diggings, but pushed off where Indians were most dangerous and nature most bleak, searching for what they believed would be the source of all this scattered gold, and believing that if they found it they would find gold in chunks. Years later this mother lode was found, and is still being worked, in some places over a mile deep; but the gold is in the seams of quartz and only costly machinery can put it into a pocket.

The California miner was cursed, not with evilness but with restlessness; he abandoned ounce and two ounce diggings to look for pound diggings. The stories of rich discoveries just over the ridge or around the bend sent him hurrying off pell-mell, just as the original stories of gold had brought him from the States.

Almost the same day that men began carrying gold over the trails, bandits appeared; it was one thing to catch native horsemen who knew the country, and another to seize suspected fellow miners; and the camps themselves were for a long time kept free of thieves, largely because men were honest, but partly because punishment was inflicted with the same liberal off-hand manner that characterized everything Californian. Sometimes the most trivial incidents would determine whether a man was to be whipped or hanged; and, unpleasant as it is to say so, a criminal affair was often made a sort of pastime, which might be prolonged or shortened according to the mood of the crowd.

But—and this is important—there is reason to believe that most of what has been recorded as humor in their meetings and trials was unconscious, and appeared as humor only to people who now know, and then knew, more of courts and law-formality than those grim earnest men, who, as free Americans, talked as they pleased in any meeting. In trying to get at facts and justice they were sometimes absurd in their deductions, and their procedure was often very like what would now be considered burlesque; but it was not so intended or regarded by them.

At times, when exasperated or drunken, they were brutal, sudden, devoid of the least sense of justice; though even at these times there were usually some who protested. In such moments of wrathful contempt for any sort of justice, they might kill the bystander who denounced the punishment as an outrage; but mostly there was an honest effort at justice, though the mountain life, so very like a throwback to robust barbarism, made them contemptuous of other people's lives and of their own. A married man was hanged for horse-stealing; further information coming to light, a miner was appointed to make such apologies as he could to the widow.

"Madam," he said, "we took John out about an hour ago and hung him for stealing a horse, and we just found out that we got the wrong man—so the joke's on us!"

"I do not vouch for the truth of this story," says the pioneer who relates it, "but I think it does give a fair illustration of the value that early California pioneers put upon the life of a man suspected of theft."

THESE miners were mostly Americans; Americans then were mostly Anglo-Saxons; and, though in every camp there was almost certainly a sprinkling of educated men, with what appears to have been an unconscious racial impulse they all, for a time, reverted to the manner of the Saxon folk-meet. Anybody might call a meeting; and anybody who swung a pick, as in ancient times any who bore a spear, whether sixteen or sixty, might lift his voice and cast his vote. The minority made no protest.

If a man was accused of crime, sometimes a jury was selected, a judge appointed; but often witnesses told their stories to the crowd, and all the miners voted "aye" or "nay" as to whether he lived or died. But if punishment was attempted without some semblance of deliberation there were nearly always men who opposed, defied, and even fought the mob.

Later, Vigilante Committees appeared in the camps to oppose the civil officers, for with the coming of formal law, its delays, tricks and corruptions, crime increased, and the miners, not wholly understanding the change in conditions, put the entire blame on the law itself. Thieves were branded upon hip or cheek, as well as whipped or hanged. In one town a notorious character, who however had never happened to be hanged, was arrested by the civil authorities for theft; and the Vigilance Committee *bailed* him out, gave him a whipping, then returned him to the custody of the law.

The average cost of food for a thrifty miner was about $4 per day; but there were few thrifty miners. Weather-beaten sailors, men from Pike County, wiry Irishmen, all sorts of miners, drank champagne and warmed in their smoky camp-kettles turtle soup and lobster salad.

Champagne cost from $16 to $20 per bottle; baking soda (known to the miners as saleratus) bobbed between twenty-five cents and $15 a pound; candles were often $1 each; pork $1.60 a pound, flour $1 a pound, pick or shovel $16. The following prices are from the books of the Sutter Fort Store:

"Two white shirts, $40; one fine-tooth comb, $6; one barrel of mess pork, $210; one dozen sardines, $35; two hundred pounds of flour $150; one tin pan, $9; one candle, $3."

At the El Dorado Hotel, Hangtown—Placerville—the bill of fare contained the following items:

"Beef, with one potato, fair size, $1.25; baked beans, greased, $1; hash, low grade, 75 cents; hash, 18 karats, $1; jackrabbit, whole, $1.50; rice with brandy peaches, $2; a square meal, $3. All payment in advance. Gold scales at end of bar."

Knives and forks, if a miner hankered for such things, were $25 a pair.

As a usual thing, sickness was expensive. The early doctors were mostly extortionate quacks. One such charged $100 a dose for quinine; but another young physician, fit to be among Californians, finished building a sick man's cabin for him, cooked his dinner and charged only half an ounce, or $8.

All reports agree that a large number of the miners were appallingly blasphemous; they used reckless oaths as casually and no more profanely than many good people say "Gosh" and "Golly." And if they were at times brutal, they were at other times, though perhaps awkwardly, as tender as women and often as sentimental as children.

The miners usually rested on Sundays, not so much out of respect for the day as because they were tired. For recreation and relaxation they washed clothes, baked beans and bread enough to last the week, gambled, drank, sang, held a miners' meeting and often hanged somebody.

At times they would hold a dance, and each who had a patch on the seat of his trousers was a "lady"; and, as such, enjoyed the advantage of the fiddler's call: "Promenade to the bar an' treat yore pardners!"

Sometimes the entire camp would go on a spree that lasted for days. Sometimes men would tramp miles just to look at a woman and hear her voice. At other times procurers who brought in lewd women to a camp would have to depart simply because the miners would not go near them. For the most part they were extravagantly gallant toward all women, yet one of the biggest camps by popular vote, hanged a pretty Mexican girl who had killed a man that broke into her room. The miners that clamored for her death drove off the men that protested; they ran one doctor out of camp and struck down other men who argued against them. And the little Mexican girl smiled as she fitted the noose to her own neck; she made a short speech saying she had no regret and would readily do the same thing over again, then with a cheerful, "*Adios señors!*" died.

The miners regarded their "pardnerships" as something binding; it was a bond of brotherhood; when one pardner owned something it belonged to the other; they nursed each other in sickness, stood together when lucky or unlucky. "Pard" was as nearly a sacred word as any among them, and the man who wronged his pardner was often hanged, not so much for the deed as because that sort of man wasn't fit to live.

They were profoundly moved by the sight of children in that womanless region; and their respect for women at times took form in willfully ludicrous and extravagant antics.

At a certain spot in the mountains a woman's hat was found; no one knew how it got there, but the miners decided to celebrate. Three hundred miners, each in a red flannel shirt and with a bottle of brandy assembled. In the exact spot where the hat was found a stake was driven, five feet high; on this the hat was placed. A blanket was draped around the stake. A miner's cradle was placed at the foot of the stake, and in the cradle was put a smoked ham, wrapped in a blanket.

The miners danced about their emblem of womanhood, frequently pausing to rock the cradle and pour brandy down the lady's neck and their own throats.

For two days the celebration lasted; then the ground was divided into town lots and became—and still is—Auburn, a beautiful and prosperous camp.

Such, in rough outline were the rough robust miners of '49. They were at times grotesque, and at times brutal; they worked hard; they played hard; they told the truth, and they were honest men. They ruled themselves with lash and noose, and had no law but their own will.

II

LATE in the afternoon of a day in the latter part of August, Hales approached the camp of Fan Fare Bar.

A bar was usually the wide flat sandbank that formed in the bend of a river. The gold from ravines, *arroyos*, gullies, and wherever else water washed across the auriferous quartz, had been brought down by winter rains and river current for unnumbered years, centuries, and lodging in this sand shifted to bedrock.

It was Sunday. Hales pressed his horse on at a rapid walk and frequent trot. He wanted to reach the camp before dark.

For one thing he expected that here a letter from Judge Deering would be waiting for him. For another, he had it in mind to mold some bullets.

In San Francisco he had bought a few boxes of cartridges that fitted his gun, a 44. These cartridges contained bullet and powder, each wrapped in combustible paper envelope so that the cylinder could be loaded very readily; and the cartridges were put up in sealed wooden boxes, containing just one charge for each revolver.

He had acquired his marksmanship in the only way that marksmanship can ever be acquired, and he kept it by the same practise.

He had used up many boxes and had not been able to find cartridges in any of the camp stores. There had been two bullet molds with the revolvers. One had been given Don José when he got from Hales the excellent revolver.

Hales had reason for thinking frequently of Don José. The young Spanish Californian and his brother, Don Esteban, and their horsemen—particularly one Don Gil Diego—had become notorious. A price was on their heads and they were hunted, if not everywhere, at least everywhere a sharp lookout was kept for them. They were greatly talked of, angrily. The miners would not take much time from gold digging to go bandit hunting, though Col. Nevinson had got handbills printed and sent these reward notices through all the camps.

With characteristic rashness, Nevinson had offered $5000, dead or alive, for either of the de Solas, just as though he were an officer of the State.

There were no officers of the State, there was no State; and the Army was only very nominally in charge of the territory. Delegates were preparing to assemble in Monterey on Sept. 3rd, '49, to organize a State government and adopt a constitution.

The miners approved of Nevinson's handbills. When a horse was stolen, a miner robbed or murdered, if no one was caught the de Solas were blamed.

In many camps all greasers had been driven out.

Toward evening Hales looked down from the crest of a ridge into the camp of Fan Fare that was sprawled in the small flat valley below. This had been a wooded valley, but the miners, busily as beavers, had cut away most of the near-by timber, throwing it into cabins and wing dams. This was a prosperous camp, a large one, old too as age went in those days. A camp that had existed for six months was regarded as one of considerable antiquity. Fan Fare had a dozen saloons or more, and two hotels, both built of canvas and rough-sawed lumber which had been brought in at enormous cost.

From afar Hales could see that something important was going on. A crowd of miners gathered in the town, and there was little movement among them. The crowd was silent, and massed near a large twisted pine which for some reason had been left standing at the center of the camp, probably because the keeper of the near-by hotel realized the advantage of its shade as a loafing and meeting place, so conveniently situated with regard to his bar.

Hales descended the steep trail and passing many cradles and contrivances called "long toms," a sort of sluice box which had recently begun to appear, came to the ford and splashed across.

Near the edge of the camp he met a miner who, with a heavy pack on his shoulders, was evidently hurrying off to his far cabin to be ready for work on the morrow.

"What's up?" asked Hales.

The miner eyed him carefully, suspiciously, noting his odd dress, the sombrero, the nearly Spanish cut of jacket and trousers.

"Oh they 're just hangin' of a couple o' greasers!"

"What for?"

"What the —— you 'spose for? Ain't fit to live. He 's one o' them de Solers. Pertends he can't savvy English, —— fool. Lot o' good it 's goin' to do him—him or the woman."

"Woman? They 're not going to hang a woman, are they?"

"I reckon they will if they feel like it," said the miner, dropping his pack and stretching his shoulders. "Who 're you?"

"Hales. Dick Hales."

"You look somethin' like a greaser yourself."

"Then look more carefully," said Hales. "How do you know this fellow's one of the de Solas? And who is the woman?"

"Stranger, this here is Fan Fare, an' my claim's 'bout five mile to ——-an'-gone. I ain't got much time for to talk, an' Fan Fare can take care of itself. They caught these two up the river an' brung 'em down. Tom Simpson he reckernized the feller as one of some greasers what robbed him a while back. They was ridin' hosses with that there de Soler brand, an' they can't give no suitable explanation o' theirselves."

"You mean they can't talk English."

"They *won't* talk it, an' they pertend not to savvy when the boys talk Spanish to 'em."

"Aren't there any Spaniards in camp?"

"In Fan Fare! Not live ones, there ain't. The boys run 'em out. They was in with the de Solers. All greasers is in with them de Solers. Col. Nev'son he's got the right idee."

"Nevinson? Is he here?"

"Not now he ain't. He was here some days ago. So *you* ain't no greaser, hunh? You shore look it. Well I gotta git up an' git."

The miner threw the pack over his shoulders, bent under its weight and plodded on.

Hales rode closer, dismounted, pushed into the crowd.

III

THE meeting was being held in the open. No building in camp would have admitted the crowd. Darkness was coming, and men were preparing to build a bonfire under the great twisted pine, the lower branches of which had long been cut away.

Hales squeezed his way into the front line and spoke inquiringly to a man by his side.

The man answered earnestly—

"We 're givin' 'em a fair trial before we hang 'em."

"But that woman?" asked Hales, glancing steadily across to where a young woman much disheveled and huddled in an attitude of exhausted weeping, sat on a box near a small Spanish Californian who stood and looked about him incuriously, from time to time rolling a cigaret.

"Her?" said the miner, regarding Hales with a suspicious scrutiny. "We ain't real sure, but we think she's that Mex-girl that used to be in a saloon to Sonora, 'r one of 'em. They used to find out what miners was doin' well an' had a pile o' dust. Then them de Soler fellers 'd come to his cabin, quiet-like, some night an' rob him. Tom Simpson there, he was robbed that way. She ought 'o be hung!"

Tom Simpson was now, officially, telling the story that he had told to one group and another many times since these prisoners were brought into camp.

Simpson, with broad floppy hat pushed back, his big grimy hands absently pulling at his beard, at his belt, going in and out of his pockets, talked toward a row of men that sat on a plank resting across kegs. There were twelve of them.

Another man, big of body, sat on a barrel with a stick thick as his own arm in his hand, and at times when the voices of the crowd grew too loud he would strike the barrel and shout—

"Shut up, you fellows."

This was Clay Freeman, who was usually

chosen as judge in criminal affairs. He was a large man, aggressive, not quarrelsome, and the miners believed in him.

"Louder! Louder, Tom! We can't hear ye!" voices from the crowd called.

Simpson gave a startled sort of glance toward the crowd, and with apparent effort lifted his voice through a sentence or two, then his tone rapidly sagged lower, falling again into the half awkward conversational mumble vaguely addressed toward the twelve men who were squeezed together on the plank across the kegs.

"We can't hear nothin'!" a man shouted.

"You don't need to hear!" Freeman shouted back, banging the barrel. "The gents o' this court can hear. You fellows just watch an' see that all 's fair an' square. Go on, Tom."

"We can't see nothin' either much! It 's gittin' dark!"

"George," said Freeman to one of the jury. "Stick a match to that firewood there. Go on, Tom. You was sayin'?"

"—this girl, Mex-girl, she was purty an' took such a shine to me that I stayed there most o' the night drinkin' with 'er. This girl—"

"You mean this here one?" asked a juryman, indicating the child-like figure that looked at no one and seemed to hear nothing.

"No, it weren't her I was *drinkin'* with. But there was three 'r four other Mex-girls, jus' come in that day. She *may* a-been one o' them. I ain't sayin', y'understand, bein' as I'm tellin' the truth, s' 'elp me God. This one—they called her Niter—" obviously he meant "Nita"—"she was coaxy, an' you fellers all know how a woman can make a man make a fool o' hisself—"

Some of the jurymen nodded gravely; some in the front line of the crowd muttered a sympathetic "you bet!" Clay Freeman took a bowie knife from his belt and whittled meditatively on his stick. He was one man of whom no camp-woman had ever made a fool, and the miners respected him in that he never went near the lewd girls that came from time to time into Fan Fare.

The fire crackled and threw up wavering tentacles of flame as if half-reaching for the high boughs, overhead. The glare of it began to cast a brazen light into the bearded faces of those near-by; and as the fire burned higher and higher, those nearest pushed back to be away from its heat.

On the outer edge of the crowd there was a continuous trampling of heavy boots and mumble of voices among the men who were too far off to hear what Simpson was saying. Now and then from afar came a vague shout, and once a man called clearly—

"Hick'ry, y'come an' git me when they bring the rope! I'm pinin' o' thirst."

"—I tol' Niter I had more'n two hundred ounces buried in my cabin, me an' pard —"

There was a low grumbling in the crowd at such folly.

"—but we didn't have that much. I was jus' talking big, like a fool feller does to a woman. We had only 'bout a hundred. She said in that funny way greaser girls talk, 'I bet you it's under your bed.' I said, 'Not on yore life.' She coaxed me to tell 'er where, an' like a fool I tol' 'er!"

Vague, low and uncomplimentary comment ran across the bearded lips of the crowd.

"—'bout four nights, maybe five, later, long 'bout midnight I reckon, me an' my pard we was awoke by somebody puttin' a gun 'gainst our heads. 'Ah, señors, eet iz a pittee to break such faith in the good God as your innocent sleep shows you to have!' says a feller—" Simpson had tried with inflexible nasal accent to imitate the soft slightly broken speech of the one who came to rob him—"an' he lights a candle. They is four o' them, an' this here little feller he was one. I know him. I'd know him in hell, which is full o' greasers!"

Simpson gestured wrathfully at the small Spaniard who smiled, as if doubtfully acknowledging a compliment. The crowd, as if at a signal, trembled with a surging movement, inching nearer, staring fixedly at the small brown *vaquero* who stood full in the firelight.

"THE leader o' this here gang," Simpson continued, "was a big feller with earrings on him. He didn't have no gun. He had a big knife, an' —— him! He was cheerful as if we ort 've been glad to see him.

"Our cabin it was up on the side of a hill, off quite a ways from anybody. This was 'bout six weeks to two months ago, just 'fore the big strike over to Horseneck Hill.

"The leader o' this here gang he didn't look perzackly like a greaser but he was one all right. He tried to be real funny. He said all sorts o' things an' mad as I was I jus' had to snort—the way he talked.

"You fellers all know I monkey with a fiddle a little, an' he spied that there fiddle. An' fellers, he could play a fiddle. I'll shore allow that he could play a fiddle. He said maybe me an' my pard 'd like to dance. We said no, we didn't think as we would, But this little feller here—this here feller—he poked a gun at me an' another un poked a gun at my pard, an' the big feller fiddled an' we danced all right, me an' pard. We hopped 'round there on one foot then t'other for 'bout an' hour I guess, only maybe it was about ten minutes.

"Then that big feller, he didn't have no beard, but a lot of hair an' earrings—he said as how ever'body knows you have to pay the fiddler when you dance, an' we'd better pay. We cussed a while an' then pointed to some yeast cans on a shelf an' they took 'em. 'Bout thirty ounces, I reckon. Then that feller—" Simpson leveled an indignant arm at the small *vaquero*—he went right to the big rock by our fireplace, turned it over an' took out the pouch. Then they took our guns an' went off.

"My pard, he said, 'How in —— did they know where that gold was?'

"I said, 'I don't know!'

"He said, 'Think! *You* must a-tol' somebody, 'cause I ain't.'

"An' then I 'member about Niter. The nex' mornin' I was into Sonora firs' thing, but she was gone. That feller—" again the leveled arm went accusingly toward the little *vaquero*—"not only stole my gold, but he made me lose my pard, cause pard he said he wouldn't stay with a feller that was such a fool as I'd been.

"I'd know that feller anywhere. He was one of 'em!"

A voice shouted piercingly: "Then let's hang him!"

"Hang 'im!" went up wrathfully.

Clay Freeman smote the barrel. His voice boomed—

"Shut up! This here's a reg'lar court, an' we'll hang 'im, but we ain't goin' to be told to do it by nobody that's not on the jury!"

He was in earnest. He meant what he said. The justice of what he said was affirmed by sudden silence.

"But about this here woman?" said Clay Freeman to Simpson. "What of her?"

"I ain't *real* sure," answered Simpson, obviously trying to be honest, but at the same time feeling too aggrieved at women to want a guilty one to escape.

"Look at 'er again, clost," said a juryman.

"Hold your head up, gal," said Freeman, getting from his barrel, approaching her.

At his touch she looked up, startled, terrified. Her eyes glanced in terror about the circle of big men, roughly garbed, bearded, now silent, grimly motionless in the firelight, all staring at her.

She broke out in Spanish, frantically pleading. Hales alone understood what she said—

"Please, good señors, do not hurt me! I have done nothing! Oh Holy Virgin, I pray! It is terrible, señor, to be here! I but travelled with Benito to the man I love! Help me dear good God for I am afraid! Oh-Oh-Oh! Why, señor, why do you look so at me!"

"Can't you talk English?" demanded Freeman, frowning in a sort of helplessness. Then, commandingly, of Benito—"What's she sayin'?"

"No sabe, señor," said Benito, looking steadily and shrugging his shoulders.

"You'll blastedly well savvy before we're done with you! Didn't you hear what Mr. Simpson said? You robbed him?"

"No sabe, señor," said Benito imperturbably.

Hales stepped from the crowd, crossed the small space brilliantly lighted by the tossing tentacles of fire, and said to Freeman—

"If you like, I'll act as interpreter."

A hum of doubtful comment stirred through the crowd. Hales wore a sombrero. "Greaser!" floated up from many mouths.

Clay Freeman looked him up and down; then—

"Who are you?"

"Hales. Dick Hales."

"Who's he?"

"Of the Venegos Rancho. Many years in California. At present on his way toward Sacramento to take service with Army scouts and help emigrants through the mountains."

"Um," said Freeman, tipping forward his wide brimmed hat and scratching the back of his head as he again looked at Hales from boots to sombrero—

"Spanish, ain't you?"

"No."

"The —— he ain't! Jes' look at that hat!" cried a voice from the crowd, and a few other voices took up the doubt. Some one shouted, "Don't let him fool you, Clay!"

Freeman beat his barrel vigorously; then—

"Who's runnin' this court! Who's runnin' it? You fellows shut up!"

There was power in the man's voice, command in his bearing. He gave the barrel's side another thump, and slowly looked all about him.

"If you care to, you may glance through these," said Hales, drawing from his inside jacket pocket an oblong pouch.

Freeman took the pouch, regarded it doubtfully, looked at Hales, then fumbled for a paper within.

The girl who had been staring in a sort of incredulous daze suddenly pitched herself at Hales, grasping his body, sinking about his feet, staring up at him, crying—

"Oh señor, good señor! Save me! I am Lucita Carrillo! These men, terrible men—I have done nothing but seek my José! Señor, you will save me! Oh the great good God has heard me!"

"Who is this man?" Benito asked quickly, sharply.

"Señor Hales who stayed at my father's rancho and met Don José!"

"Ah," said Benito and peered steadily at Hales. "The good God *has* heard you, señorita. I know of him."

Rapidly voices rose—

"What's she sayin'?"

"It's a trick, Clay! He knows 'er!"

"He's greaser hisself!"

"Hang him too!"

"Don't let him fool you, Clay!"

The burly Freeman glared about him, turning this way and that; then when silence fell on the crowd, Freeman beat his barrel with slow deliberate blows and shouted:

"Silence! If any fellow thinks he can run this court better 'n it's being run, just let him step out here an' say so. Ain't that right, boys?"

Freeman turned toward the jury, and to a man the jury nodded gravely; some of them looked with studied challenge at the crowd, some bent forward and spit tobacco juice. And there was silence. Freeman had been a butcher in a central New York town before he joined the gold rush; and having been an honest man all his life, he knew but little of courts and procedure, but he did know that a court which put up with interruptions from on-lookers was not much of a court.

When he was sure that there would be silence for some time, he fumbled with the documents in Hale's pouch, and held one of them to the light while he read. He read slowly, spelling out some of the words to himself, and his lips moved in a low mumbling. Then he refolded the document, placed it with the others, unread, and handed the pouch to Hales.

He lifted his voice purposely:

"That one's enough. This court ain't got time for readin' much. If you've been a Captain in the Texas Rangers, I reckon you're all right.

"Boys, that there I just read is a letter from the Army. This here is Cap'n Richard Hales of the Texas Rangers. That there paper says he's been a scout an' a good one, an' he speaks Spanish like a greaser. Glad to meet you." Freeman put out his hand, then—"Now if you'll just tell us what this girl's got to say for herself. Don't make much difference what the other fellow says because—"

"This girl," said Hales, "is only a child. I know of her family. I stopped at their *rancho* when I came from the south to San Francisco. She says that the man she loves is somewhere in this part of the country. She has been trying to find him."

"Then what's she doin' with this fellow? Ask *him* if he didn't rob Tom, here?"

Hales asked: Benito answered—

"If I say yes, or if I say no, it will be the same, señor. So I say no."

"Tell him we're goin' to hang him," said Freeman. Then, across his shoulder, toward the jury— "Ain't that right, boys?"

The jury gave off straggling answers, low-voiced, with emphasis—

"Sure are—"

"You bet—"

"That's right."

Benito shrugged his shoulder.

"Tell him," said Freeman, "we're goin' to send him straight to hell, so he'd better confess."

Benito replied—

"No, señor. They can kill me. They can not send me as they say. The good God, He will do with me as He thinks best.

The gringos, do they not rob us? Do they not kill us? No, señor. A man dies because he can not live always. Today—it is as well as tomorrow when you are dead."

He shrugged his shoulders and lighted a cigaret.

This answer, translated literally, was not pleasing; the reproach made some who heard it a little indignant; the indifference to punishment somehow seemed to cheat the punishment.

"What's she doin' with him, Cap'n? Find out about that," said Freeman.

Benito explained with a brevity that was not usual when he spoke, but the shadow of Death had perhaps impressed him more than he showed in other ways—

"Señor, Don José gave to me a letter and said, 'To Lucita, Benito. To Lucita, and bring me an answer.'

"I lay on the hillside till I found one to carry my letter to the beautiful Señorita. I waited for the answer. She came out of darkness. She said, 'Benito, Don José writes me and says Goodbye; that he loves none and will ever love none but me; but while he has life he will fight with gringos, and when he is dead he will pray God to hate them; so I must forget him, my José! But Benito, I love him. If I stay, I shall die. Benito, take me or here, now, I kill myself.'

"I took her on my horse until I reached our *rancho*. I got a horse there for her. All of every day I begged that she would go back; but her answer was— 'On, Benito. On!' When I came to where Don José said I would find him, he was not there. I do not know to where he has gone, but the señorita said, 'On, Benito! On!' We went on to where I thought he might be. Today these men seized us."

Hales asked—

"Is this true, señorita?"

"It is true, señor."

Hales had hardly begun putting her story into English before, out of listening silence, a voice boomed—

"De Soler's woman! Hang 'er too!"

Voices broke out—saloons were near, many men had been drinking.

"Hang 'er!"—"Whip 'er!"—"Hang 'er!" —"De Soler's woman!"—"Hang 'er!"

"She 's one o' them like cheated Tom!"

Other voices rose angrily—

"No!—"

"Hang a woman!—"

"You're crazy!—"

"A *woman!*"

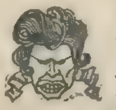
The crowd began to stir, to shove, to surge. Men shouted loudly at men who stood at their elbows. The way Tom Simpson had been cozened by a de Sola woman stung many of them to reckless wrath, and these men made the most noise. There was the mingled cry of "Rope!" and "Whip!" and the oaths of men who said that such a thing should not be.

"How about it?" said Hales into Freeman's ear. "Are you with me? No man lays a hand on her!"

Freeman struck his barrel and shouted, but the crowd did not hear. It was surging. Men were pushing and being pushed. Arms waved aloft, oaths burst.

Lucita, on the ground, clung to Hales' knees and stared in terror. Benito sidled closer to them, but he showed no fear, though his eyes glanced sharply this way and that, looking for a chance to dodge out of the uproar.

Some one threw dried boughs upon the fire, and instantly it leaped high, throwing its glare into the faces of the crowd, sending flickers of light into the heavy shadows that closed in as the flames fell only to toss themselves up again writhingly.



MEN in the crowd had become wildly angry. Some were infuriated by the idea that being a woman could save a woman from justice. In any crowd, drunken men make the most noise. The mob passion swayed some who were not drunk. Other men pushed at them, pulled, shouted pleas that were not heard. The crowd trembled with the surge of struggle. A man broke through, crying—

"I'll get 'er!"

Hales' revolver came from its holster with a flash of movement, and to rest in a level aim at the fellow's head.

"Back!" said Hales, and the man sagged backward, step by step.

"Up here, Jury!" Freeman bellowed. "Up here an' defend your prisoners! That's what a jury's for, an' by —— this court's goin' to run itself somehow!"

The twelve good men and true, peers of the land, came off their bench and bunched resolutely about Lucita, encircling Benito, facing the crowd, and their hands fumbled at the handles of their revolvers. They knew no more of courts than Freeman knew; but they knew what they thought was right, and they stood in their tracks, ready to do whatever they thought needful to be done.

The men of the crowd shouted hot words into one another's faces, waved fists, shoved, struggled, roared in menace.

The great primeval hills lay darkly against the starlit sky, and now and then the hills with wondering echo, repeating the word as if in astonishment, caught up some man's fierce shout. The pines of the high crest stood like serried sentinels, aloof, motionlessly watchful of the noisy men in the little valley far below, that trampled about in anger and talked with wild words; and the hurrying river, with the chant of the wilderness in its rapids, flowed on with tumbling eagerness, fleeing to its great mother,-the Sea; hurrying through ripples and around bends as if to escape from these bearded creatures that dug into it with picks and shovels, plundering its treasure—treasure gathered grain by grain through the centuries.

A man pushed into the crowd, crying—

"Gentlemen! Gentlemen, I am a lawyer and—"

Storm of words broke upon him. The miners then, as always, distrusted lawyers and wanted none of them. They believed in their own ability to determine upon and to enforce justice; and lawyers had the diabolical gift of making them feel that a man whom they believed guilty might be innocent.

"Throw him out!" rose in a chorused shout.

"There's too much talk now!" Freeman bellowed. "Throw him out!"

The man, obviously a newcomer or he would have had better judgment, was jerked back into the crowd, pushed, shunted, shoved, knocked roughly from one to another until he was thrust from the outer circle and into darkness.

"Now," cried Freeman, leaping to his barrel, brandishing his stick, "this here court will continue to run itself without lawyers!"

A clatter of cheers went up.

"We'll take a vote!" Freeman shouted.

More cheers.

"Them that is for lettin' this here court an' jury do its duty, stand over here. Them that wants her hung, get over there!"

It was nothing new to have the camp vote by falling into groups; and Freeman, who had the gift of strategy, indicated the positions in such a way that those who would defend the woman were gathered near to her. Men came rapidly out of the crowd, and from the far edges of the crowd where they had stood in silence. There was no doubt as to the sentiment of the great majority.

"Why, even here's Tom Simpson hisself," shouted Freeman, pointing with his club, "who's got more reason than you fellows for wantin' justice done, an' he's votin' the girl ain't guilty!"

Simpson straightened up in a kind of proud surprize. He had simply stood in his tracks from the time the crowd grew stormy, without any thought that he was casting his vote. Reproaches from the very small minority that stood in darkness were thrown at him; but Simpson shook his head and shouted back—

"I said all along it wasn't her!"

"Then why," yelled an aggrieved voice, "didn't you talk up loud so we could hear?"

"There wouldn't a-been no vote if we could a-heard you!"

"We don't want no innercent woman hung even if she ort a-be!"

"What about the man—do we hang him?"

There was a pause. A sudden voicelessness fell upon them. From the top of his barrel Freeman looked about. For a moment the very rush of the river could be heard, and the great silence of the wilderness that is like a vague and nearly noiseless sound seemed pressing upon the camp of Fan Fare Bar as men, that but a moment before had been noisy with anger, stood with hushed breath.

Deep-voiced and slowly, Freeman spoke—

"The court finds him guilty an' he'll be hung now, right away. Bring a rope."

There was no cheering, only a murmuring babble, the stir and press of men shifting about to get where they could see.

"Come," said Hales, putting an arm about Lucita, "we must go from here."

Trustingly she pressed against him, and looked with fright at the men who were grim, nearly silent, waiting for something, she knew not what.

"Come Benito," she said quickly. "Come with Señor Hales from these terrible men."

Benito took off his hat, bowed, spoke softly—

"I remain, señorita. It is nothing but a little death. Light a candle for me and say a prayer if Benito seems worth so much to you."

Hales took her away. The crowd parted with staring silence. She was crying again, not understanding why those men would hurt Benito, not understanding why Señor Hales could not save him too.

A ROPE was thrown across a limb of the twisted pine; a noose was made; the barrel was moved, and Benito, with hands tied and the noose about his neck, was helped to the top of the barrel. They thought that his dark face looked strained, even pale in the firelight.

The rope was drawn snug.

"He ought to confess, now!" said some one.

"Now tell the truth, 'cause we 're goin' to hang you anyhow," said Freeman, standing before him, peering up. "Did you rob Mr. Simpson?"

"*No sabe, señor*," said Benito, shaking his head and trying to smile.

What need to know this barbarous tongue of the wild gringos when it was his own, as the good *padres* had told him in his childhood, that was spoken in Heaven!

And so he died.

IV

ALL the hotels of the mining camps were conducted on what is known as the American plan: the meals were included in the price of a bed. These beds were nearly always bunks along the sides of a big room; a year or so later the big hotels had two or three eight by ten bedrooms; but in '49 nearly all of the hotels had merely tiers of bunks, into which the miners threw themselves fully dressed. At times the proprietor, possibly with a view to the care of his blankets, posted the notice:

GENTLEMEN ARE REQUESTED NOT TO GO TO
BED IN THEIR BOOTS

Hales inquired from men in the darkness as he passed by them which was the largest hotel and how to find it. He was told by some that the largest hotel was the Empire; by others, Fred's House; and Fred's house being the nearest he went to it.

Not a light was burning there. Everybody from bartender to cook appeared to have gone to the hanging. Hales went in through the wide doorway, which was without a door and would not have one until the winter rains came. The room was darker than the night, for roof and walls shut out the stars. Lucita clung to him as if fearful that something in the dark would seize her.

He struck a match, and holding it above his head caught the flickering glimpse of a rough bar that ran clear through the shadows, as if endless, and behind the bar were shelves on which was a motley array of bottles, canned goods, blankets. Hotels were also grocery stores. There were rough tables and rough chairs.

A low hoarse voice, edged with pain, spoke out of the darkness—

"Candle there at the end of bar, pard. Lantern too, some'eres."

Hales, striking another match and half groping, with Lucita holding to his arm as she followed with anxious peering toward where the voice had spoken, found the candle and lighted it. The small flame burned with a mild spluttering as if in petulance at having so much darkness to overcome.

He pulled a chair from a table, saying, "Sit here, Lucita." She sat down, but instantly jumped up and held to him as he went across to where a big young miner sat in a chair with one leg stiffly before him on a plank that reached to another chair. A blanket was folded over the leg.

"You 've been hurt," said Hales by way of saying something.

"Yes. You bet," said the miner, who was one of many known throughout the camps as "Yank." A sense of suffering emanated from him. His face was bearded. His eyes sunken, feverish with pain. "I got a leg smashed. Rock she shore fell on it. Doctors here say I can't live unless it's cut off. Say I'll shore die quicker if it is cut off. So what's a feller to do? An' she shore hurts. Hurts bad. Me an' my pard we built a cabin to winter in, but I was brought down here to the hotel so I could be took care of better. Guess I ain't got long to live. Ain't that the little Mex-girl? An' air you a greaser?"

This man too looked like one of the sons of

Titans, young, bearded, powerful, crippled. The flickering shadows played about his eye sockets, into which pain seemed to have burrowed. There was the moist glint of suffering on his forehead, but no wince or whine in his voice. He looked steadily at Lucita.

"Purty little thing, ain't she? Some o' the boys they was drunk I reckon, 'cause nobody in Fan Fare 'd hurt a woman. No. Not in this here camp."

"Have you any women here, good women?" asked Hales.

"Oh, you bet. Fan Fare's got two women in 'er. There 's Mrs. Gubbins. She 's a real woman. Come 'crost the plains with Gubbins. Drove the oxen when he was flat on his back, sick. Got two chilern. The other woman she's just a lady an' does washin' for the miners—cusses worse 'n any man in camp. I don't like to hear a lady cuss. It don't seem fittin', does it? But she's a real lady anyhow. You bet! But Mrs. Gubbins she 's our kind of woman. She took powerful good care o' me when I was first hurt. Ever' day most she comes up here to see me now. There's nothin' like a *good* woman to make a feller feel a —— fool for bein' one.

"There 's two dude gamblers went off to bring in some ladies to Fan Fare. They was due back here today. They're goin' to put 'em here at Fred's House. There used to be two ladies here, but Clay Freeman an' the boys asked 'em to light out after one night they took Hick'ry's pouch. Hick'ry he 'lowed that he give 'em the pouch, 'cause he don't want no ladies to git into trouble over him. But the ladies they was awful anxious to give it back to him an' git. So they did. Them gamblers said this was too big a camp not to have some real ladies, so they went off to git 'em. When they come Mrs. Gubbins she won't be comin' up here so much to see me. She 's a prayerful woman, Mrs. Gubbins is.

"I reckon me havin' my leg hurt so I can't dance an' carry-on makes me feel different 'bout things than I useter. The boys they carry me out o' my bunk ever' mornin' an' tote me back ever' night, so I jes' set here an' look on a lot. Me bein' a dyin' man like, I think things I never thought a-fore, the which bein' mostly what a fool I allus been. I dug as much dust as the rest, but like the rest I spent 'er too. Here comes the boys now. The hangin' 's over."

The miners, with something like the sound of storm in the hum of voices and tramp of feet, came with a rush toward Fred's House. In the same way they were going into other saloons. Anybody with a shack of cloth or lumber, a gallon of whisky and a few tin cups, might have a saloon; with a table and a few stools this might also be a gambling house.

Fred's House was a one-story structure, built entirely of rough lumber that had been freighted into the camp at a cost of about forty cents per pound.

Hung through the rafters and draped all about the large barroom was red calico. Its brilliant color gave the bleak barrenness of rough lumber a flush of warmth.

The men came with trampling rush and babble into the barroom, calling for drinks before they reached the bar. Fred, a fellow with a large mustache and the professional air of good fellowship of the tavern keeper hopped and shouted behind the bar. Fred was noisily agreeable and talked much. His partner was one Black Perry, a sullen and evil-eyed man.

Men lighted candles and the lantern. There was a tumultuous bawling for drinks, and supper. The men now remembered that they had forgotten to eat.

A miner bearing a glass of whisky came over to the crippled Yank, asking—

"How air ye, pard?"

"Fine, Joe. Ever'thing go off all right?"

"Y-e-es," said Joe doubtfully, looking at Hales and the girl. "Here, git outside o' this, pard."

"Here 's how!" said Yank, and drank.

"Mr. Gubbins isn't here, is he?" asked Hales.

"Him?" said Joe, with no friendliness. "Not more'n likely he ain't. His missus don't 'low him to do much celebratin'."

"She's a good woman," said Yank.

"Was Gubbins a friend o' yourn?" asked Joe.

"No," said Hales. "But I thought perhaps Mrs. Gubbins might take care of this girl tonight."

"We don't like greasers none too well in Fan Fare," said Joe, doggedly.

"Now Joe, that there ain't no way for to talk!"

"I'll talk whatever way you say, pard. But I got to feel like I can't help," said Joe, looking humbly at his partner. Then to Hales with an almost savage tone: "You see him? His leg 's all busted an' he's got to die so the doctors say. I don't know what good doctors is if they can't fix up a man like him! I was down in a hole—"

"Shut up, you Joe!"

"Shet up yoreself, pard! I was down in a hole an' a big boulder she jarred loose jes' above an' started for the hole. Pard here he jumped right in front o' that there rock. He didn't stop 'er. Goda'mighty hisself 'd had to push some to stop 'er. She went right over him, but he shore turned her out o' the way so she didn't come down in the hole. I'd been smashed like a cricket y' step on. That's what he done for me, an' I can't do nothin' for him. I'm for hangin' all doctors. They're spry enough when you 've got a belly-ache an' charge an ounce or two for a little smear o' somethin' out of a bottle—but when a man like him 's hurt, they can't do nothin'!"

THERE was silence between the partners, or pardners as it was more sacredly known in the mines. Yank looked down into his emptied glass of whisky, and Joe stared with the solemn ache of helplessness at the man who suffered, waited for death, and did not complain.

Men were drinking and stamping about at the bar. There was the intermittent thud, thud, thud, thud of heavy pouches being dropped on the bar, from which the unctuous Fred and the thievish Black Perry took liberal pinches.

"We 're goin' to have some girls by tomorrow, boys," said Fred, with a large jovial air. "We 'll have to have a dance to celebrate. Fan Fare's too big a camp not to have the infloonce of purty ladies. Them gentlemen allowed they 'd be back by tonight, shore."

Fred beamed with something of a satyrish leer on his full face, and cast hopeful glances at the men. Some said, "'Ray f'r the ladies!" and some said nothing.

One or two monte games were started, and a few men, with a bottle of whisky on the table and tin cups at their elbows, were beginning to play poker.

Many men from a distance stared at Lucita, looked hard at Hales, spoke conjecturally in low voices.

"How 'bout supper?" bawled a lusty voice.

Such a noisy chorus went up, demanding supper, that Fred with gestures that he meant as a playful pretense of alarm, hurried off to see if the cook was properly busy.

"Tell me," said Hales, "how will I find Gubbins' cabin?"

Joe looked at him, then at Yank, again at Hales.

"I don't reckon as how you will find it, 'less you know where to look."

"Take 'im down there yoreself, Joe. An' tell Mrs. Gubbins thank'er for that rice soup she sent up this mornin'."

Joe looked doubtful. He glanced without favor at Hales, frowned at Lucita; then with resolution—

"All right. Come on."

V

GUBBINS' cabin was about a half mile from the hotel. Mrs. Gubbins, before she would let her husband work his new claim at Fan Fare, had insisted upon four walls and a roof, with a window. The cabin was reached by a winding trail that circled perilously among holes, some of them abandoned, which the miners, with no time to spend shoveling dirt unless to get at the gold, did not refill. Drunken men frequently broke their necks by toppling into such holes.

Joe was uncommunicative. He said little more than, "Watch out here," or "This here hole caved in on two fellers. Killed 'em both."

From a distance as they approached the cabin, Hales saw the faint light through the doorway, and heard a woman's voice, loud and sharp. Children were yelling in shrill merriment. The woman simply lifted her voice above their racket.

"—a blamed shame, Pete Gubbins! That's all I got to say! A blamed shame! The idee of you men takin' the life of a feller critter what God A'mighty give jes' as much life to as he done to you. I don't care if this here *is* Californy—'t ain't no reason for men bein' worse 'n Injuns! Don't set there askin' me what I'd a-done! That ain't no fair way for to talk. I'm tellin' you you men done wrong, an'—"

The two children, a boy of about four, a girl a year older, with their little tummies full of hot beans, cold river water and mother's freshly baked bread, had cut holes in a piece of old canvas and were trying to make their dog, some sort of hopeless mongrel, wear a dress. The dog, who had brought these children across the plains, had licked 'lasses off their little hands by way of sharing their dainties, and had warily watched the wagon when the whole family slept in a dead fatigue, now suffered the indignity of a nightgown with only a mild scrambling and writhing.

At the first sound of footsteps the dog broke away, bounded to the doorway and barked furiously. Then, recognizing the miner, Joe, wriggled his body and wagged his tail apologetically, trying to pretend that his barking was merely a joke; and to make sure that was understood he thrust his wet nose against Joe's hand. The dog sidled off from Hales, approached cautiously, sniffing with great interest at the leather garments; but, having decided that Hales was all right, and meant no harm to the Gubbins family, the mongrel nosed Lucita's dress and seemed pleased when she, a little nervously, patted his head and spoke in the softest tone he had heard since the Gubbins babies babbled wordless prattle at him.

As he re-entered the cabin the children, with screaming play, dodged recklessly between men's legs, cornered their dog under the table, and with laughter loud as war cries, dragged him off to the indignity of a dress. Strangers were too common for these children to give them much attention.

Fan Fare was almost as proud of these children as of its rich diggings; miners saved pretty rocks for them, brought them captured gray squirrels and blue jays—which Mrs. Gubbins promptly turned loose. "They git sickly in boxes an' it gives me a smothery feelin' to see 'em there," she said.

Mrs. Gubbins was young, thin, darkly tanned. She wore her hair in a knot at the back of her head. Her dress was of calico. Her sleeves were rolled up. She had sharp steady eyes and a firm mouth; her face was pinched, her nose sharp. She was of the tireless breed that will not wear out, and will not give in. She had driven their wagon across the Humboldt Sink while her husband was flat on his back, half dead, and the children lay gasping for air, moaning for water. With ox goad in one hand and the Bible in the other, because, as she said of it, simply, "—it give a helpful feelin' like havin' holt o' His hand," she had pushed across that pit of desolation where hundreds abandoned their wagons, oxen and cattle perished, men, women and children died. She had come through, though in her own words:

"I was clear like crazy. I daresn't open my mouth 'cause the dust it was thick as the skeeters in an Indiany swamp whar we come from. But ever' time them cattle 'd stall, I'd say, 'God help us!' anyhow. Then I'd give 'em a prod hard as I could an' lean agin the wagon wheel—shovin'! An' ever'time she 'd budge, 'r I wouldn't be here now!

"I hear tell there 's some folks don't b'lieve in God A'mighty. Queer folks they must be! I jest wisht I could take 'em crost the trail we come over. They 'd b'lieve in Him mighty strong, I bet you—'r they wouldn't git through. No sir-ee they wouldn't! The time ain't never goin' a-come when I don't give Him praise f'r keepin' me on my feet there in the Humboldt!"

She now came to the doorway with—

"Howd'y, Joe? Howd'y folks? How 's Yank?" With a keen long stare at Lucita as she spoke: "You folks come right in an' set. Ain't had supper yit, I hope. Pete, git off that cheer! What 's yore name, Miss?"

Pete Gubbins was a lank sort of man, strong enough now, slow of movement, rather silent by nature as well as by necessity when near Mrs. Gubbins. His wife's word was very nearly law, though they did have a pretty strong difference between them on whether to go on with mining or to get themselves a farm.

The cabin was lighted by a candle stuck into an inverted bottle from which the bottom had been broken. The neck of the bottle was thrust into a knot hole of the table.

"This here," said Joe awkwardly, "is Cap'n Hales. He's been a soldier an' now he's goin' up to help emigrants over the mountains this fall. I reckon as how that 'll make you like him some. 'Twas him that kept the boys from gittin' reckless when they was for hangin' 'er too"—he poked an arm toward Lucita—"an' he wants to have a talk with you-all. Yank he said to bring 'em. I got 'o git back an' see 'bout Yank. 'By."

Joe, having done his duty, hurried off.

"Peter Gubbins!" Mrs. Gubbins turned on her husband with voice pitched at its top note. She shook a menacing finger. Lucita edged closer to Hales, holding tightly, afraid of the woman's voice, of her flashing anger. "You didn't tell me you fellers nearly hung a *woman!* You didn't! You knowed better! Hang a *woman!* Think I'm goin' to have *my* chilern brought up whar there's such goin's-on? I'm shamed o' you, Pete Gubbins! I'm shamed o' the whole kit an' caboodle of ye!"

"Maria, you see we didn't!" said Gubbins helplessly. "I was one o' them as voted agin it from the first—wasn't I, mister?"

Hales, knowing very well that with a wife like Mrs. Gubbins to face Pete could not have voted otherwise than he claimed, answered—

"Yes, Mrs. Gubbins."

"Well, ye listened to talk about it! An' Pete Gubbins, I'll tell you onct agin for all time, I'm tired o' these here minin' camps. I want some ground an' a home for my chilern. We 're goin' light out o' here jes' as soon—"

"Maria," Gubbins protested, "we got company folks!"

"Then git off that cheer! Set down, miss. I bet you-all ain't had supper yit, an' there 's plum plenty—"

They had been having supper on a rough table without covering of any kind. An iron kettle of beans was the source of most of the supper. A huge blackened, battered coffee pot was on the table. Coffee, when they could get it, came in the beans and was ground by being put into a canvas bag and smashed between stones. On the table was also a flat chunk of bread, a slab of salt pork. There were no forks. The spoons were of horn. Two or three times a week they bought beef from the camp butcher to whom cows were brought by native drovers.

"We don't have no oysters an' such stuff," as Mrs. Gubbins said at times, "'cause they ain't worth what you got to pay for that there truck. We jes' put by what Pete takes out o' the diggin's, 'cause I want a home, with some cows an' chickens an' a garden!"

Hales explained to Mrs. Gubbins that Lucita understood no word of English; that she was the daughter of a high-caste Spanish family.

"I don't know what to do with her. She refuses any suggestion of returning home. I don't know how I would get her home if she would go. You see, she has been foolish because she loves a man."

"It do beat all," said Mrs. Gubbins, when she had heard Lucita's story, "what fools us women can be over a man! I mind how I thought I jes' shore would *die* if Pete Gubbins married some other gal!"

With arms akimbo she gazed intently at Lucita, then asked abruptly—

"What 'd *you* think, Mr. Hales, 'bout farmin' as agin minin'?"

Pete Gubbins glanced at him beseechingly, but Hales said—

"Mrs. Gubbins, I know nothing of mining. I don't know how long this gold will last. But I do know something of California land. It is very rich. If you can get where there is water, or where water can be put on it, you can raise anything. The Spaniards get vegetables and grain by hardly stirring the ground. The climate is mild all the year. I am a rancher."

"We 're goin' to light out o' here," she announced firmly, looking not at her husband but at the two tumbling children whose baby hands the mongrel mouthed in playful protest.

* * *

"Y' JES' know she can stay right here with me!" said Mrs. Gubbins, gazing upon the dark-eyed, rich bloom of a child who stared wistfully and in doubt at this sharply featured, harshly voiced woman.

There were two bunks in the cabin, an upper and a lower, one for the children, one for the man and wife. The doorway was without a door. The precious window, on which Mrs. Gubbins had been insistent, had glass bottles mortised with mud for a pane. There were no window panes in the camp, and, mostly, white canvas or sheeting served for glass when windows were closed against the weather.

"Pete, you go up to the hotel with Mr. Hales to stay. An' don't you go an' git tight, neither. Hear me?"

Pete, with all the awkwardness of a man of the house rebuked before company-folks, protested vaguely that he never got "tight," as overindulging at the mouth of a bottle was called.

While he was putting about to find his pipe and tobacco—the children had the pipe and were trying to teach the dog to smoke, like daddy, as well as wear a dress like maw's—Mrs. Gubbins, as she called it, "lit into the doctors" for the way they treated Yank.

"Know what's the matter with them fellers! Four doctors up an' down this here bar. They know he'll die less they cut off his leg, but they 'fraid! Yes sir. Dr. Perle, he 's jes' a young feller an' more hones' than the others, he tol' me hisself, 'Mrs. Gubbins, I'll tell ye hones' Injun, if I should cut off Yank's leg an' he died, as he shore would, the miners 'd say I was a pore doctor, an I'd lose all my practise.'

"That 's what he tol' me right to my face. Know what I tol' him? I said, says I, 'Doc. Perle, you're a mighty pore specyman of a doctor, you are, if you don't do yore best to help a sufferin' feller critter, what's as fine a man as Yank is! So there!'

"I hate cowards, Mr. Hales. I *hate* 'em! That's one thing 'bout Pete. He's quiet an' he 's pokey, Mr. Hales, but this here man o' mine when he gits his dander up ain't afeard o' nothin'. I've seen him stand up to—"

"Now Maria!" Pete begged; then, strategically— "Come on, Cap'n. Le' 's be moseyin'—"

As they walked off, Mrs. Gubbins shouted piercingly after her husband, telling him to behave himself up there at the camp.

Out of the backwoods they came, hundreds, thousands, of those women; uneducated, harsh of voice, unmannerly in the manner of daintily reared women, but pure of spirit and fearless. They marched on foot in step with husbands, fathers, brothers, reading their Bibles by the light of camp-fires on the plains, following as surely as did ever the chosen of the Lord the cloud by day, the pillar of fire by night; encompassed by dangers, they sang their hymns with the glow of smoldering embers on their faces, and lifted their faces to the stars, searching out the countenance of God, beseeching his mercy with words of inviolable faith.

They passed through the Shadow of the Valley of Death, miracles attended them and they did not perish; they pressed on, giving courage to those about them, sustained by the strength that is Womanhood; and when they entered the Golden State, they demanded not gold, but homes, schools for their children, houses for the worship of God. It was the women of '49 and the '50's, gaunt, fierce-eyed, unafraid, refined by a faith that is greater than grace of speech or smoothness of manner, wives and daughters worthy of men who dared the deserts and the mountains—it was these women who laid the hearthstones of California.

VI

WHEN Pete Gubbins and Hales reached Fred's House two other women had arrived in Fan Fare Bar; women of that calling old as the flesh of man, and wherever men go, they come.

They had now retired to such privacy as could be given them in that one-story hotel, which meant that Fred himself had turned over to them the room used by himself and his partner, Black Perry, where the girls now washed themselves of travel stains, and were putting on those brilliant dresses and gewgaw trappings that give flash and sparkle to worn and lusterless women.

They were Betty and Lotta, who falsely called themselves sisters, probably because they belonged to the ancient sisterhood; they were part French, but said that they were American girls. They were dead tired, and would have liked nothing better than to drop into even the hardest bunk of the camp and sleep as they fell. But Fred, who had an eye for business as well as a weakness for debauchery, said the boys were all primed for a celebration and would be powerfully disappointed. Besides, their masters, the young dude gamblers, late of San Francisco, demanded that they look their most charming and be as spirited as if neither were weighted by more years than are comfortable for any woman.

The barroom was well filled with men, most of whom had eaten, for the second table had been filled, and the stragglers were at the third. In the mining hotels, as on the steamboats that ran to Sacramento and Stockton, when a meal was ready it was announced by shout or gong, and every man who wanted to eat made a rush for the dining-room, scrambled into a seat, began to grab food; those that were crowded out retired to the barroom to wait until the luckier men had fed, when the second table would be called; then, if necessary, a third.

A lantern, the only one in the room, swung from a rafter. Many candles were burning.

There was a group of men standing about Yank, and Gubbins paused there. Hales, in passing, heard Yank's deep voice saying slowly—

"She shore does hurt, boys. She shore does!"

Hales glanced at the faces that hung over him, bearded, strong, silent faces, full of pain and sense of helplessness; young Titans who could tear down a mountain or flume a river, but could not ease the pain in the crushed leg of one of their own men.

"—— the doctors!" said a deep voice, and Hales recognized the tone of Yank's surly partner, Joe.

Other men in the room were gambling and drinking. There was a nervous excitation in the air; voices were high pitched with the tense restraint that marks the last struggle with decency before the breaking loose of carousel. Women were there, women of the sort that tingle nerves, perfumed, giddy, wanton. Later these women were to be as familiar as the gambler's black or green cloth thrown across the table where he made his game; but now that were exotically rare, and many of the men were sober enough to be half ashamed of themselves, though disquieted by an eagerness for the roistering of women.

The two gamblers, young blacklegs, but recently holding full-fledged membership in the Hounds, were in the dining-room, eating.

Hales went to the bar. Black Perry, a heavy man with a dark scowl and the sign of having shaved three or four days before on his face, came up along the other side of the rough plank bar.

"Is there a letter here for Richard Hales?"

He gave Hales an unpleasant scrutiny and asked with disfavor—

"Was you expectin' mail?"

"Yes."

"Then you'd better go over to that varmint what runs the Empire. He stands in with the feller what brings the mail. What y'goin' to have?"

"Nothing," said Hales, pointedly, and the two men for a moment eyed each other like old enemies. Perry was in shirt sleeves; he had on a collarless white shirt. The sleeves were folded above his hairy forearms, and the shirt was very dirty from long wear.

As Hales turned away he heard Black Perry laugh heavily and say—

"Greaser-lover!"

Hales' hand twitched toward the handle of his revolver. Blood warm as fire seemed to flow to the surface of his body. But ignoring the call to a quarrel he went out of the doorway, and walked angrily in the darkness, for a time without knowing which way he went.

He presently heard steps near-by and called. A miner answered and told him where to find the Empire Hotel, just over the way.

"I hear they got girls to Fred's House?"

"I hear they have," said Hales and went on.

Before he really noticed what was at hand, he found himself in the shadow of the twisted pine. Among the ashes of the big bonfire there were the gleaming crackles of light, like the brilliant threads of *cloisonne* workmanhsip. Instinctively he glanced up, and there before him hung an oblong black blot. Hales' throat became dry and tight. He paused for a moment, half moved by the impulse to cut the rope, let down the body; but, saying to himself, "he doesn't know—he wouldn't know anyhow," again went on.

VII

THE Empire was as much like Fred's House as one egg shell is like another. Many men were here too, drinking, playing cards, talking.

Hales went to the bar. The bartender said—

"You bet! There is a letter here for Richard Hales. You him?"

"Yes."

"Two-fifty."

The charge for delivering letters to the more remote camps was sometimes as high as five dollars; the only mail service until express companies developed their organization, was such as packers and freighters gave haphazardly for what profit they could get.

Hales opened the letter, a fat one, and drew close to a candle. The Empire was lighted by candles only. It was not so difficult to get lanterns but it was hard to get oil. The letter was from Judge Deering, and contained much of interest.

Judge Deering in an oratorical passion was direct and forceful; in conversation he was rather long of breath, and sonorous of period; but in writing he meandered through elaborate phrases as if half hopeful of concealing what he meant.

Hales had quitted San Francisco while Anna was still desperately ill. She was still under the care of Mrs. Preble, the preacher's wife.

Hales had said to Judge Deering:

"I hope she dies; but while she lives—I have no faith now in her repentence. She has gone too far down. Yet because my brother loved her, no matter where she goes or what she does, I feel that I must try to see that she is looked after."

Judge Deering wrote also that it was being whispered about the city that Col. Nevinson was in a bad way, financially; he still owned a monopoly on lumber, but building was slack, and his reckless spirit had involved him in so many enterprises that it was a pure gamble as to whether he crashed or made millions.

The judge reported that Ilona Tesla had firmly insisted upon placing her father's affairs wholly in the hands of Deering & Taylor for settlement.

> — Col. Nevinson left for the mines on business. Miss Tesla continues to reside at El Crucifijo, though, whatever Col. Nevinson may think of the matter, he is not now the owner of El Crucifijo. Miss Tesla's detestation of gambling, sir, is such that she has required that every dollar be withdrawn, at whatever sacrifice, immediately. My respect and admiration for her increases with each visit. She is accompanied as closely as her own shadow by an odd sort of rascal who, I understand, was formerly attached to our acquaintance of doubtful respectability, the Dona Elvira—

The important piece of news in the letter was this: Mateo's information about the true ownership of El Crucifijo had been confirmed.

Cowden had owned some land between El Crucifijo and the bay; but he had *not* owned El Crucifijo, though it was carelessly known to Americans as Cowden's Ranch.

Cowden, who had been eager for money, evidently had taken no pains to explain to Col. Nevinson that he was selling less than the colonel bargained for; and the colonel, in verifying the Spanish deed, had taken it for granted that the landmarks, which he did not trouble himself to identify, included El Crucifijo itself.

The de Coronals, who really owned it, had, with the indifference of an affluent Spanish family, abandoned the ill-fated El Crucifijo to whatever use any one who took possession of it cared to make.

Hales had said to Judge Deering—

"If this Mateo of yours knows what he is talking about, and the de Coronals are willing to sell, reasonably, buy the ranch for me, and say nothing to anybody."

As Hales refolded his letter he knew that he was the owner of historic El Crucifijo, and he smiled slightly, thinking of just how far Col. Nevinson would go into the air when he learned of this.

At that moment Clay Freeman, who had been waiting until Hales finished with his letter came up.

"Cap'n Hales, have a drink?" asked Freeman.

"Certainly."

"I hear they got women in tonight over to Fred's House."

"Yes, so I hear."

As they reached the bar other men gathered near, and thus spoke Clay Freeman, ex-butcher of Syracuse, N. Y., for any who cared to hear.

"We got one lady in this here camp that is a lady. I mean Missus Gubbins. We got another one that though she does cuss some an' charge steep as a roof for washin' of our duds, is also a lady. I mean Missus Jones. Fan Fare is proud of 'em. But we ain't proud of havin' Fan Fare no rival of Sonora an' Hangtown, like in San Francisco, where so many women strictly speakin' ain't ladies. Californy, she's a free country I reckon, an' folks can do as they like if they don't steal nothin'. But I got a boy back in the States. He's just a little shaver now. But when he's half growed I want to be able to say to him, 'Son, I've been around some an' seen things, but I never wronged your maw, an' I don't want you ever to wrong the lady you marry, no matter how purtty some other woman may look f'r a minute when you're way off som'eres an' think nobody won't ever know nohow.' "

He paused, and there was silence. It was plainer than men often offered one another on a subject almost, by common muteness, forbidden. No one made any comment. He had expected none. There was an uneasy shifting of feet, a nervous clearing of throats, a pre-occupied lighting of pipes and fiddling with whisky cups. A reflective blankness was shadowed forth on many faces. The butcher of Syracuse had declared himself before all men; and the men, with a kind of awkward but true modesty, felt uncomfortable.

"By the way," asked Hales of the men about him "did any of you ever hear of a gambler named Dawes? I knew him slightly in San Francisco. I would not like to pass through a camp he happened to be in without looking him up and exchanging a word or two."

One after another said no, or shook their heads.

"Cap'n," said Freeman, "this here is Doc. Perle. He was up the river today when we hung that fellow, but he's heard the boys speakin' a lot about you."

Hales looked into the face of a younger man than he had expected a camp doctor to be; it was a clean-shaven face, with a somewhat boyish mouth, a sort of youthful eagerness, intelligent steady eyes.

"I hear you've been with the Rangers, Captain. My brother was in the war. Lieut. Perle. He was on Scott's staff. Maybe you've heard of him?"

"I'm sorry, no," said Hales.

He and Dr. Perle drew somewhat apart and talked for a time of war; then Hales asked—

"Why don't you cut off Yank's leg?"

Dr. Perle looked at him with surprize, then—

"It would kill him."

"He'll die anyhow, won't he?"

"Yes. Day by day I've seen it creeping up. He's dying literally, inch by inch. It is terrible."

"Why not try it?"

"Why, Captain, I'd have to cut his leg off almost at the thigh! I haven't instruments, and he would die right on my hands. I would have to leave camp. I know these miners. I heard of a doctor at Sonora who tried to operate on a miner. The miner died. The doctor had to leave. The miners nearly lynched him."

"Yes," said Hales. "I heard of that too when I was in Sonora. But that doctor was drunk. The miner did not want to be cut up. The doctor should have been lynched. This case is different. Why don't you try?"

Dr. Perle grew pale and stood thoughtful.

"A man like Yank ought to have whatever chance you can give him," said Hales.

"But I'd have to cauterize his leg with hot iron—like doctors did three hundred years ago! I'm not enough of a surgeon, Captain Hales. I wouldn't trust my own ligatures."

"Yank's as good a man as those that stood the iron three hundred years ago. Give him a chance."

"There's no place to operate. He'd have to be kept quiet for days. Bandages of cold water changed every two or three minutes."

"There's Gubbins' cabin. I'll help carry water."

"I haven't instruments for that. I haven't even a saw. His femur would be as thick as a cow's!"

"There must be something that would do. There's a butcher in camp. Use his saw."

"My God!" said Dr. Perle weakly.

"Why not talk it over with Joe and Yank?"

"Oh Yank's willing enough. And I would—would, but I am afraid."

"Do you think, Dr. Perle, that that brother of yours, the lieutenant, would have hesitated at anything that seemed his duty?"

"No no. *No!* But—"

"But what?"

"With the blood spurting from an artery, I *know* I couldn't tie a ligature. Look at my hands, rough as a miner's! I would have to cauterize!"

"Then cauterize," said Hales. "Yank's too good a man not to have his chance."

The young doctor was deeply moved. He said—

"If Joe and Yank and the boys understand—I'll do it, Captain. I'll do it tonight, now. But God help me!"

VIII

CLAY FREEMAN said that he would go ask Mrs. Gubbins if her cabin might be used, though he knew that it could; and two men went with him.

Some one went to Fred's House and came back with Tom Gubbins and Joe, more surly than ever, full of curses because Fred's House was wild with noise, and a fiddle kept the crowd dancing while Yank lay in his bunk suffering through all that racket.

"I was jes' comin' anyhow to ask if we couldn't bring Yank over to the Empire," said Joe. "A man he shore don't have many friends when he ain't got two good legs."

"I'm afraid he will die under the operation," said Dr. Perle. "But I know he will if he isn't operated on. If he's willing, I'll try."

"Yank ain't afeard of death, Doc."

"The pain will be terrible, Joe."

"Yank he's a man, Doc. I wisht to God

you could cut off my leg an' cure Yank thataway!"

Clay Freeman came back with the news that Mrs. Gubbins was already fixing up her cabin for them. She had sent the two children and the Spanish girl up the river to Mrs. Jones, asking if they could stay the night. Two of the miners had taken them.

"Missus Gubbins she weren't at all 'sprized, boys, 'cause she'd been askin' the Lord to make Doc Perle operate, an' she 'lows the Lord can make even a doctor do what he ought when it gets the time."

No one smiled. No one thought it amusing. It was not said as wit nor received as jest. Dr. Perle stood tense and pale, like a man who has been chosen for a duel with a foeman that is seldom beaten.

A few of them went to Fred's House, entered through the kitchen and to Yank's bunk.

The shouting and clattering from the barroom was tumultuous. The noise came through the ill-fitted walls as through a net. The whine of the fiddle was almost lost in the stamp and scrape of boots. It was like the festival of barbarians, powerful, free-handed, half-drunken. Men shouted in auction bids for dances with the women of revelry.

Clay Freeman held a candle in his hand as they gathered near Yank, and told him of what the doctor offered to do.

"Well, Yank," said Joe, "the Doc says it'll hurt like —— an' you're nearly shore to die."

"She can't hurt worse Joe, an' I'm willin' to take the chanct."

"I'll have to cauterize with hot iron, Yank," said Dr. Perle.

Yank's deep eyes, full of pain, looked up steadily through the candle light.

"I don't know what cauterize is, Doc, but go ahead."

"We'll need something better than candle light—I ought to wait till morning—"

"No you don't, Doc. I feel I ain't goin' see mornin'. I been feelin' it strong."

"I ought to have something for ligatures in case—but I know I can't tie them!"

"What would do? Any kind of string?" asked Hales.

"The cat gut of that —— fiddle," said the Doctor, listening. "That would be the thing. And that lantern. We have to have that lantern."

"All right, we'll git it, fiddle an' all," said Joe and started.

"Wait," said Freeman. "We'll call Fred out here an' explain."

Fred came, jovially drunk, professionally agreeable, and, like an owlish eyed satyr with a heavy black mustache, listened to Freeman, who said that Dr. Perle was going to operate.

"Now ain't that fine, boys. Yank'll be hoppin' around spry as a cricket. Come in an' have a drink, boys. I—"

"We want your lantern an' them fiddle strings," said Joe. "The doctor needs them strings for litertures."

"The lantern, sure boys. I'd do anything. But the fiddle—"

"I can find something else I guess," said Dr. Perle.

"If them fiddle strings are the best, we're goin' to have 'em," said Joe, glowering.

"But the boys in there are on a spree. They won't like it," Fred protested.

"I reckon as how they will if they know it's for Yank. Anyhow, I'm goin' to git it, now. An' any —— man that gits in my way's goin' to git hurt!"

With that Joe pushed the satyrish Fred aside and started. Hales followed. Freeman came with them, and Fred, in the tavern keeper's alarm at seeing good business hurt, pushed behind Freeman.

A new group of men entering attracted no notice. The revelry went on; and looking upon it, seeing the shaggy men, jovial, full of play, with laughter on their bearded mouths, it did not appear as grotesque and brutal as the noise had indicated. The weary women, their eyes ablaze with drunkenness, were good dancers, their bizarre costumes were, in that rough calico-hung hall, picturesque; and the noisy men did treat them with an exaggerated gallantry that was meant respectfully.

Freeman, Joe and the agitated Fred went directly to the fiddler, who was jigging about on a little platform of planks and shouting the calls of the dance. He stopped suddenly as Joe's upreaching hand grasped the fiddle by the neck. The dancers, left abruptly without music, gaped at him across shoulders, turning slowly, wonderingly.

Hales went to the lantern, reached up, unhooked it, shook it near his ear to guess at the amount of oil. It was full, had been filled for the celebration.

A hairy hand snatched at the lantern, a heavy voice said—

"Here what the —— you think you're doin'—you —— greaser!"

Hales hit Black Perry and Black Perry toppled backward, falling.

A woman screamed, less out of fear than for the excitement of a scream. There was an encircling grouping of men, an explosive clamor for what had happened and why?

Black Perry with a look in his eyes that showed the wish to do murder, rose slowly on one knee, glaring at Hales, and his hand fumbled with a bowie knife on his hip; with a sort of animalistic instinct he was judging the chances of a rushing lunge, steel against an undrawn gun, for he, and many men of that day, with good reason, believed a knife more deadly than a gun. Those behind Perry pushed hastily aside to be clear of bullets. There was a look about Hales which they took to mean that he would shoot and shoot quick, though, as if baiting Black Perry to the attack, his hand hung loose at his side and in the other hand he held the lantern.

With an oath a shrill voice shouted excitedly—

"That's Dick Hales! Don't try it Perry —he'll kill you, sure!"

Hales did not look toward the voice nor look aside when another cried—

"Hales! Look out, Perry!"

The young gamblers, ex-hounds, knew him; and the excited blacklegs had cried their warning to one who was their friend.

Black Perry's courage did not equal his anger, and he arose with his right hand dabbling at a trickle of blood on his face.

Joe roughly pushed through the circle, swore at Black Perry, said—

"We want this here lantern for Yank. Doc Perle's goin' cut off his leg. What you mean—"

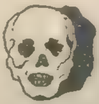
The miners were not much given to thinking of any man as a hero, but Yank was as nearly one as any man among them could be. He had tried to stop a boulder that would have squashed his pard, and they had seen him suffer, silently. Voices stormed at Black Perry, fists swayed in menace. Interfere with Yank's operation would he?

He backed and twisted anxiously, trying to explain, blaming Hales for not saying what the lantern was for, that he would do anything for Yank—

The fiddler struck up. He, by good luck, had extra strings. Joe had gazed with sullen desire on the fiddle itself.

Some of the miners who had been dancing now hotly swore that it was a shame to have such goings-on while Yank was having his operation; they argued and swore about it. Others protested that there wasn't nothing they could do anyhow, so why not dance? But some of them, a few, with loud stamping to show their protest, marched out of Fred's House and went straight to the Empire, there to drink quietly out of sympathy for Yank, and await the news.

IX



THEY carried Yank on an improvised stretcher of blankets and saplings; four men bore the stretcher, and Joe held the lantern for their feet and gave warning of rough places and the holes.

Overhead the stars danced brilliantly in a cloudless sky; and all that Yank said from the time they left Fred's House until they reached the cabin was—

"Boys, I wonder if tomorrow night I'll be up there settin' on a star, lookin' down at ol' Fan Fare?"

No one answered him.

Dr. Perle and Hales followed. Over and over the Doctor said—

"Why didn't I wait till morning? I'll need light. I should have waited till morning, but now he's got it into his head that he will die, and a man that feels that way is half dead already."

Once also he said reflectively:

"I came to California more for the adventure than the gold. I don't suppose anybody can understand—except a doctor—but I'm going to go through the biggest adventure I ever imagined before this night is over. I cut off a man's finger once, but a leg!"

Mrs. Gubbins was watching from the cabin door and came out quickly to meet them, and the men with the stretcher, by a common impulse, stopped as she bent over Yank, brushing his forehead, saying quietly:

"You'll be all right, Yank. Don't ye be 'feared o' nothin'!"

As she came from the doorway another figure appeared, silhouetted grotesquely against the dim candle light. This was Mrs. Jones, who did as much of the camp washing as was humanly possible, and charged what was high for even a camp laundry; but there wasn't a better washerwoman in any camp. Fan Fare was, in a way, proud of her.

She had come to Fan Fare with a sickly husband. He died. She was not old but she looked old. Her body was stooped; her face was nearly as shriveled as her hands, perpetually in water. She was clean, even tidy, always or nearly always pleasant; she smoked a pipe, she liked a nip of good licker, she could and did swear like a muleteer; but by all the standards of Fan Fare she was a lady. She lived alone in a tent and did not know what fear was. There was nothing to be afraid of except loneliness.

When the half-frightened Lucita, and the two sleepy children with their dog had been taken to Mrs. Jones, Mrs. Jones put the children to bed, gave the dog a bone, patted Lucita on the head, telling her in words that few good women ever use that she was a pretty little thing, then gathered up an armful of clean rags, thriftily salvaged from miners' discarded clothing, came to Mrs. Gubbins' cabin and said—

"I know doctors use up a powerful lot of rags"—only she used a stronger word than "powerful"—"an' you havin' chilern to wear out ever' stitch, I thought maybe these'd come in handy. An' I'm goin' to stay right here an' help nuss Yank."

In the deep fireplace, walled with boulders, a fire was burning. It was nearly flameless, but red with coals. The bean pot had been emptied, scoured with sand and canvas, filled with water, and was simmering. Mrs. Jones knew too, she said, that doctors used a lot of hot water, some of 'em.

The miners started to bring Yank into the cabin, then stopped, backed out. There were two bunks, one above the other; the top bunk was too high for him to lie in, and it would be difficult for Dr. Perle to work if he lay in the lower, because the upper would be in the way.

Dr. Perle spoke of this. Hales noticed, though no one else may have done so, that there was something almost hopeful in Dr. Perle's voice, as if, after all, circumstances would keep him from the ordeal he so greatly dreaded.

But Mrs. Gubbins spoke up:

"Pete Gubbins, you git the ax. You boys tear out that top bunk an' hurry too!"

"All right," said Gubbins readily, but moving with a kind of lank leisureliness, habitual with him whatever his hurry. He went outside to where he had been making pegs for shelves to be put in the cabin, and brought an ax.

"Here," said Joe, "you take holt o' this Pete. I'll do the work."

Gubbins took the lantern; Joe took the ax, and stepped inside. The women moved back, standing clear of the swing of the ax.

"Keerful now, Joe," said Mrs. Jones. "Don't make no more muss 'n you kin help."

The bunks were of rough hewn boards, split from pine. Joe did not chop, but driving with the head of the ax loosened the upper boards from the posts into which they had been wedged. As they were loosened, Hales carried them outside and dropped them on the ground.

Joe stepped back, through with his work. With one impulse the two women pushed together to the bunk, hastily straightened out the covering, shook and turned the pillow of ticking, stuffed with pine needles, stroked the wrinkles from the blanket, as if a man who was having his leg cut off would notice if the blanket was not smoothed; but such is the unconscious mothering touch of women, of some women.

"Bring Yank in," said Mrs. Gubbins.

The miners brought him in, bent, placed their stretcher partly on the low bunk, helped him to squirm on to it.

They clumsily folded their stretcher and stepped back awkwardly, getting in one another's way, crowding the small cabin. Some one bumped against the table, jarring the candle flame into frantic wavering.

"Now you boys git out o' here," said Mrs. Jones. "Bring in that there lantern an' git out. Me an' Missus Gubbins 'll do the tendin'."

The miners stirred, but hardly moved.

Then Clay Freeman laid down on the table the butcher's saw that he had borrowed. Dr. Perle stared at it. His face was pale. At that moment he looked very young and nearly helpless.

Joe silently drew from his pocket a bottle of whisky and set it carefully on the table. Dr. Perle glanced at the bottle, then at Joe, again at the bottle, but his eyes went back to that saw. Looking at it steadily he began slowly to take off his coat. He threw the coat with a careless fling at a far corner, unbuttoned his sleeves and began to roll them above his elbows. He had never cut off more than the joint of a finger from a human being.

"You boys git out o' here now," Mrs. Jones repeated, having taken the lantern from Pete Gubbins, and removing the chimney was preparing to wash it so that all the light from the flame would be at the service of the Doctor. The miners had a habit of saying that Maw Jones washed everything she got her hands on, which was nearly true.

The men, with slow heavy steps, their eyes toward Yank, backed out reluctantly. It was not that they felt they could help by staying, it was not wanting to stay and stare that made them move slowly; it was because they had a helpless feeling of desertion, though they could no longer do anything for him.

Dr. Perle spoke nervously—

"Captain Hales?"

"Yes."

"There must be no—no noise. Will you—you stand there at the door—and—and don't let anyone in—or look in. I'll do the best I can—" he now vaguely addressed the doorway, where the men were grouped, motionless, heavy with anxiety—"you stay there, outside. Stay out, even if he calls or—you know—it will hurt something ter—it will hurt him some. No talking, and—and please don't watch!"

"All right, Doc," some one mumbled, as if his throat was too dry to speak clearly.

Then the young doctor looked uncertainly from one to the other woman. Maw Jones was wiping the chimney until it shone as if glazed with diamond dust. Mrs. Gubbins was bending over Yank, talking rapidly in a low tone, reassuringly.

"I don't think you ladies—I don't think you can stand it," said Dr. Perle, at that moment feeling that he himself could hardly endure what was coming. "You'd better let Captain Hales hold the lantern for me, Maw."

"Shucks," said Maw Jones, without emphasis and with finality.

"A woman what can't stand anything to help a human bein' an' feller critter ain't much of a woman," said Mrs. Gubbins, also with finality.

Dr. Perle looked at them and shook his head a little. They did not know what was coming. He opened his small case of instruments and said absently, "Tut tut tut tut"— they appeared that unfit and inadequate. His eye fell on the saw, then he gave a start and looked toward the fireplace.

"Boys," he said in a strained low voice, again vaguely addressing the doorway, "I've got to have a piece of iron, something—something like a piece of wagon spring, or the head of a pick."

"I got a pick here back o' the house," said Gubbins.

He brought the pick. He and Clay Freeman, with a stone, knocked the handle out, and Freeman brought the pick head into the cabin.

Dr. Perle took it. He took up one of Maw Jones' rags and with a cup of hot water began to wash off the dirt.

"Let me do that!" said Maw Jones, taking the pick, nearly forcibly.

Dr. Perle uncorked the bottle of whisky, poured out half a cupful, looked about for a spoon and laid it beside the cup.

For a moment he stared imploringly toward Hales. The doctor's young mouth was set tightly; there was a kind of hopelessness in his eyes.

When the pick was washed Maw Jones held it before him for some seconds before he noticed.

"Here Doctor," she said.

He looked at it, took it, gazed at it; then with resolution stepped across the cabin, stooped and thrust it deeply into the coals of the fireplace; and he paused there, looking into the fire as if reading omens in the flickering of the red coals.

When he straightened up he seemed more self-possessed, looked older, appeared no longer to be aware that people were near him, hovering outside in the darkness, staring through the door, waiting.

He took up the gut fiddle string, examined it, wiped it with a wet rag, tested it with a jerk, then cut it into suitable lengths.

The women watched with motionless intensity, like two of a holy sisterhood attending upon the priest in some ancient mystery-rite. Maw Jones held the lantern firmly between her two withered hands and, slightly stooped from much bending over dirty clothes, awaited expectantly, standing as if crouching a little. Mrs. Gubbins, with one hand to Yank's forehead, held a pan of water in the other.

"Now," said Dr. Perle, looking about the cabin, "I must have something for a tourniquet."

Possibly of those who heard, only Hales understood what a tourniquet was; but the women too looked about as if to see one.

"This buckskin strap is the very thing," said the doctor. "Now a piece of wood"—he spoke toward the doorway—"about eight inches long, an inch thick."

"A'right," said Gubbins. He went into

the shadows and picked up one of the pegs that he had been making with which to fasten up shelves in the cabin.

"Good. The very thing," said Dr. Perle absently, taking it.

The courage that sooner or later comes to a man in the midst of a great and honorable daring had come to him; and he was now the doctor, the surgeon, the duelist with Death, forgetful of everything but the work before him—an operation almost as primitive as that imposed upon the surgeons of the Middle Ages—he, a mere boy, who had come to California for adventure.

"Just put the pan down, Mrs. Gubbins. We don't need it yet a while— If you can stand over there, Mrs. Jones— Hold the light up. No, not quite so high. There. That's just right— Now Yank, this will hurt a little at first—that cup of whisky, and the spoon, Mrs. Gubbins. Give him a little, half a spoonful, or less, at a time. Not more— Yank, I think perhaps I ought to tie your hands down. This is going to hurt, and if you move—I'm afraid you'll struggle, and—"

"Jus' give me somethin' to hold to, Doc," said Yank, groping at the side of the bunk with one hand, and at the log wall with the other. "Jus' give me somethin' I can git my fingers 'round, an' I'll not move, Doc. I promise!"

Mrs. Gubbins with a hasty movement put down the cup and spoon. She turned quickly toward an old battered trunk, flung open the lid, and drew out a black thick worn book, heavily bound with leather. With a kind of noiseless rush she turned to the bunk, thrusting the book against his hand.

"Now you jes' take holt o' this, Yank. Put yore hands on it tight as you can. Keep holt on it an' you'll be all right. It brought *me* through the Humboldt!"

Yank cleared his throat, took the book between his large work-hardened hands. He said—

"All right, Doc. You won't hear no word out o' me."

Dr. Perle straightened up, took a deep breath, glanced toward the fireplace, then stooped and lifting the blanket from over Yank's leg, began to take off bandages.

Maw Jones held the lantern as steadily as if turned to stone. There was not a quiver on her hard, wrinkled face.

Mrs. Gubbins gave Yank a spoonful of whisky, but he groped for her hand and put it against his forehead. Child-like, he wanted the woman's touch more than the whisky.

A moment later his body quivered. Dr. Perle had slipped the tourniquet around his leg, high up on the thigh, and slowly, steadily, began to twist, saying quietly, watchfully:

"This is the worst my boy—let's get this good and tight, Yank—it may hurt a little, but steady my boy—it will be all over—steady, Yank—"

A trickle of blood appeared on Yank's bearded mouth. He bit his lips. He made no sound. Mrs. Gubbins' palm was moistened by the sweat that came dew-like upon his forehead. His muscles jerked convulsively, hardening tensely. His closed eyes would flash open as if blown wide by agony, but he made no sound.

Outside of the cabin men stood and did not speak, and hardly moved. Some stood in the glow of the doorway, some in the darkness. Joe sat on the ground with knees drawn up, his head pressed between his hands. Not one of them could keep his eyes on the man that suffered, over whom the two women stood watchfully and did not flinch or turn their eyes aside.

Presently not one of the men that waited would even glance toward the doorway. They could hear the gnaw of toothed steel on bone. Joe muttered curses that were intended as prayer. Clay Freeman, ex-butcher, walked off and sat down on a stump.

Hales too wanted to walk away, but stood with back to the doorway, ready if the doctor should call. He felt sickened, and also he felt his own legs fairly ache with pain.

Out of the night and from afar there floated faintly through the still air of the wilderness the echo of an occasional shout and high-pitched call from where some men still held revelry, also with women.

THERE was a low harsh moan from Yank.

"Unconscious, thank God!" said the doctor. Then, "What a man! He *ought* to live!"

"He's goin' a live!" said Mrs. Gubbins, low-voiced, fiercely.

"Ah, conscious again! Too much pain—just a drop at a time on his lips, not more! Might strangle him," said the doctor.

His voice was calm as a general's, directing a battle.

Yank gasped, soundlessly.

"We'll be all through here in a minute now—here, over here, hold the lantern—that's it. Ah!

"You are doing fine, Yank, my boy—wonderful— Don't talk!— Yes, oh yes, it's off—Still feel it, eh? Sure, you'll feel it for days—long time—but it's off—all cauterized and clean. Don't talk—not one word to anybody—or move—don't move a finger. I mean it, Yank. Not a finger.

"I said not to talk! But it *is* off, Yank. You will feel it for a long time, but you must not talk!

"These bandages—I have great faith in cold water, but the cloths will have to be changed every few minutes in fresh water—ought to be every three minutes, night and day, until the inflammation goes down."

"You have somebody fetch the water, an' I'll change 'em tonight," said Maw Jones. "You kin go down to my house, Missus Gubbins, an' git some rest. Me, I'm a Georgy cracker—I don't need no rest."

"Don't talk to him," said the doctor. "He must be quiet. He can't sleep, but he may doze—I—I can do nothing more now. A little whisky at a time, very little, and a little water if he wants it—but quiet—must be alone now, with only one of you ladies—"

"I'm stayin'," said Maw Jones, and she pulled up a stool and sat down by the bunk. "You folks git out. Have somebody fetch water an'—"

"I'll fetch it—the whole —— river," said Joe quietly from the doorway.

The young doctor was putting his instruments together. His hands trembled, his mouth quivered nervously though tightly pressed. He would not look up, and seemed half-abstracted in his movements. Now and then he paused and looked at the palm of his right hand.

Mrs. Gubbins, ready to leave, though it was night, threw a sunbonnet over her head. She touched the doctor's arm, looked at him intently—

"You're the greatest man in Californy, Doc Perle!"

He shook his head, moved his hand toward the bunk but glanced steadily at its palm. His voice was hardly more than a whisper and trembled—

"There's the greatest man—what a man!"

As he and Hales walked back toward the camp, Dr. Perle was so nervous that he could hardly talk; but he did talk, almost incoherently.

"—nothing like it! What a man! I—I have heard of men—leg or arm—no sound—impossible! But he stood it! What a man! I—I never knew what it was to be a doctor—surgeon—like something sacred—but what a man! Here, look here!" He held out his hand, palm up. In the darkness Hales could not see, but he understood. The palm and fingers were seared—"I picked up that iron before I thought, and it burned me—I almost yelled—just a little burn! I dropped it—then used a cloth, but he—he stood it all! He's got to live—it would be cheating—*cheating*, to have him die now, and—and God Almighty won't cheat a man like that!"

X

THE big spree that had started in Fred's House had, by the following afternoon, dwindled into the sloppy drunkenness of a half dozen miners who sang and stamped and dozed, drank and gambled, and quarreled maunderingly. They would not go back to work until they were "strapped," and as long as there was a glimmer of dust in their pouches they would remain blear-eyed and woozy.

Nearly all the miners had scattered up and down the river, returning to their claims, either sleeping off the bad whisky, or without sleep again grubbing and shoveling gravel into cradles and sluice boxes.

Yank remained alive; just that and nothing more.

The camp had rather a heavy heart, was not proud of itself, felt that it had not treated Yank just right in celebrating when it did,; hadn't been square with Yank.

"Yes," Clay Freeman had said, "we could hear the goings-on clear down there to Gubbins' cabin."

If Yank had been killed by the boulder, the miners would have buried him respectfully, and have forgotten him at once; but living, he could not be forgotten, and to have a leg cut off was worse, in a way, than death.

Moreover the camp felt the depression that comes over decent men after they have been on a debauch, and Yank's leg gave them an increased sense of guiltiness. Those that felt the most self-reproach most strongly put the blame on Fred's House rather than on themselves.

The young and haggard Dr. Perle had lapsed into depression, and did not believe that Yank would live. He told Hales so.

Maria Gubbins told Hales that Yank would live. Moreover, she had already built her plans into the future, talked of them with Joe; it wasn't necessary to talk them over with Peter Gubbins—time enough when Pete was told what had been decided. Joe was to go on mining; the Gubbins would take Yank with them when they went farming; and when Joe had a stake he would come and buy a farm beside them for him and Yank. When Maria Gubbins made up her mind she had her say; even the Gubbins' oxen had learned that of her.

Hales found that Lucita, who was hardly more than a child herself, had been accepted as an equal by the Gubbins' children, by even the dog; and they all understood one another very well without a common speech.

Lucita admitted that she wanted to return home, but said she would not; she was afraid of her parent's anger, fearful of Señor Guerrero's warty nose which might become that of her own husband's. She wanted to find José, and be with him, stay with him—whatever else became of her she did not care.

Hales regarded her with grave puzzlement. The children of Spanish-Californians were seldom disobedient; a son of fifty years, with his own large family, would be humble in the presence of his father.

He inquired among miners and storekeepers, but none of them knew anything of the Spanish families in that part of the country, except that there were some—somewhere. The camp butcher suggested that Hales wait and talk with the *vaqueros* who drove in beef; they were due in two or three days.

About the middle of the afternoon Hales was sitting in a chair of the nearly deserted Empire barroom. The bartender lounged over a table, spelling out the news from an ancient newspaper. A miner played solitaire at another table. A bottle of whisky and tin cup were before him. He solemnly bet with himself on the outcome of his game, and when he lost would not take a drink.

Hales gazed reflectively through the door at the high hills and thought of anything that drifted into his mind.

He heard the thumping scrape of heavy feet and looked up casually as a man not very clean of dress, his clothes being spotted with grease and kettle black, and who was obviously not a miner, paused in the doorway.

"Er you Mr. Hales?—Wall, then thar's a letter f'r y' over to Fred's."

The fellow, who was cook at Fred's House turned to go.

"Why didn't you bring it?"

"There's charge o' three dollars agin it. An' the boss he said 'o tell ye if y'wanted it to come an' git it. That's all I know."

The fellow turned and with shambling gait started back to Fred's House.

"I think he lied," said Hales to the bartender who had glanced up from his paper. "But I'll go over and find out why."

"Well," answered the bartender, "if you're goin' 'o trapse around lookin' up the why of all the lies that's tol' in this here worl', you'll soon wear yore legs down to nubbins."

HALES stopped in the doorway of Fred's House and glanced about the barroom. But four men were there. One lay as if dead drunk in a corner. One, a young fellow, with something of the rat in his face and the dude in his dress, was behind the bar. Near the bar, at a table, Black Perry and the other young gambler played cards. Hales saw that they did not look up.

He felt warily that he was being invited into a trap. The intentness of these men with their cards was not quite natural. But as with many men where danger is suspected, Hales hesitated to draw back. If he drew back he would never know whether or not there had been danger, and so would always remember his discretion with something like shame. Besides, at no time would he have backed away from three such men as these, two blackleg gamblers and a heavy-browed saloon-keeper.

From the bunk room Hales could hear through the flimsy partition drunken voices in goodnatured wrangling, and now and then the call of women—

"Just a minute, boys, and we'll be with you—" Stay right there, boys—" "Wait right there—" "Don't go away."

Hales stepped inside, paused, looked

steadily at Black Perry, still in shirt sleeves, in the same white collarless shirt. No doubt he had slept in it, would continue to sleep in it for many nights. His bare forearms were covered with black hairs, like bristles. His black brows nearly met above his nose, a thick bulging nose. Hales looked at the back of the gambler who played with Black Perry. The fellow wore a narrow-brimmed top-hat, a "stove pipe." It was rather shabby of texture, but impressive as to fashion. He had on a high collar, not clean, but high. His coat was black and fitted snuggly. His clothes, as his manner and skill at cards, were meant to ape the high-caste, rigidly emotionless, fastidious gamblers of San Francisco.

The second gambler, behind the bar, leaned on his elbows watching the game. The table was close by. He was very young, clean-shaven, but the youthful face had on it the print of the devil's hand. There was about the mouth that frozen half sneer with which young ruffians seem to contemplate a stupid world that sets such value on honesty when a little craft, edged with boldness, can take from honest men everything they own. His brown eyes had in them that blank, impudent furtiveness, common to weaklings in the ways of evilness. He was bareheaded. His hair was parted, brushed up carefully. He had rings on his fingers.

"Is there a letter here for me?" asked Hales.

The bartender looked up, raised his head a little, then took his elbows from the bar. Black Perry and the gambler appeared deaf, uninterested, absorbed in their game. With a glance toward them, the fellow that was acting as bartender turned to the shelf behind him, picked up a letter, dropped it on the bar indifferently, saying—

"Three dollars."

Then he leaned again on the bar, watching the game.

Hales, with a quick and unobstrusive movement, loosened the gun in his holster, then walked to where the letter lay, face down. He turned it over. It was addressed to

RICHERD HALLES

He regarded this spelling doubtfully, at the same time reaching for his pouch.

"This," he said, "is not quite my name."

"Reckon it's for you anyhow," said the bartender.

"How do you 'reckon' it's for me? When did it come?"

"Been here all the time," said the bartender, taking a quick step backward.

There was the faintest scrape of a chair. Hales turned, hand to gun. Black Perry had stood up determinedly, and with a seeming effort at noiselessness. There was a faint expression of surprize under his dark brows, and his hands moved quickly together, in front of him. They were ostentatiously empty. He sidled to the bar, leaned an elbow on it, kept his hands before him, but demanded quarrelsomely—

"*Now* what you belly-achin' about?"

"This letter —"

Hales paused. He sensed danger. There was something wrong. He did not glance toward the misspelled letter. He looked steadily into Black Perry's eyes and saw them shift uncontrollably toward the bartender, then toward where the other gambler sat.

Hales knew better than to look around.

Instantly Black Perry was saying, wrathfully—

"What about that letter? It's yourn, ain't it? You was hollerin' for a letter las' night. Well, what in —— the matter with you—"

The fellow painstakingly kept his empty hands in view, yet he was forcing a quarrel, holding Hales' attention.

Hales, sensitively alert, saw what was up. One glance aside, in any direction, and he would have a knife into him; and if he did not glance aside he would have the knife, or bullet, from behind.

Black Perry's gaze wavered for an instant to something, some one behind Hales; and at that moment, too, Black Perry started to curse, cursed angrily, with hands still empty.

Instinctively Hales knew the trap was being sprung on him, and how; then he did not hesitate a moment, but drew his gun, and with one continuous movement threw it up, and up-side down, muzzle pointing backward across his shoulder. Then jerking his head around for scarcely more than half of a backward glance at what he aimed, he shot; *and, instantly, he faced about and* shot again, point-blank into the body of Black Perry who had reached for his knife. The next moment Hales' gun was leveled at the head of the bartender, but the fellow had both hands in the air and his mouth open.

"Don't shoot! Ow, don't shoot!" he begged.

"The reason I don't shoot," said Hales, "is not because your hands are up, but because I want one of you alive to tell the miners just what you tried to do—and why? Why did you?"

The noise of the gun brought the miners stumbling drunkenly, with eyes bulging, from the bunk room. They gaped, blinking, and sagged into awkward attitudes, for the moment motionless while their blurred senses groped and fumbled to understand.

A woman, dressed in red, with a flaring Spanish comb in her touseled head, came to the bunk room doorway. Her puffed eyes widened with a look of frightened amazement as she caught sight of Hales, standing with gun drawn and two dead men at his feet. She screamed—"Ow they didn't get him!" and jumped back, out of sight.

The drunken men stared with owlish sobriety. Even the fellow who had been asleep on the floor, in the corner, kicked and scrambled with a kind of dazed leisureliness until he got to his feet, then came forward with a toppling sort of walk, stood in weaving unsteadiness, blinked, with nodding motion of head, and muttered:

"Ol' Black Perry, uh? Biled shirt all mussed now, shore. Um-m-m Gam'ler Jim too eh? An' me 'sleep. Miss ever'thing! Never goin' sleep 'gain. Nope."

These miners were full of whisky and had been joyfully foolish; but they had hard heads, and listening intently they understood at least a part of what the bartender said, with his hands still in the air, his eyes wavering from the muzzle of the gun to Hales' face, on which there was no glimmer of mercy. He spoke with a confused whining rush of words:

"—knew Fred wouldn't stand for it, but when Fred went down there to ask about Yank—all Perry's doin's—he wrote the letter—meant to get you in the back while you was openin' it—or have Jim shoot you—they meant to get you anyhow they could—they figured you bein' friendly with the de Solas they could make it right with the miners—tellin' how you an' that de Sola shot fellers in the Magnolia that time—the girls were to keep them miners there in the bunk room so nobody'd see nothin' an' Black Perry could tell his own story, how he liked—I warned 'em, Mister Hales—I warned 'em you'd get 'em— Hones' I did—don't shoot *me*—please—oh—I—"

IT WAS well toward the end of the afternoon; the sun was already looking between the tips of the tall sentinel pines of the westward hills; but word was sent up and down the river, calling the miners to gather and pass judgment. They were tired, weary with work; some had heads that still ached; many had to come from distant claims; but, excited, and with short tempers, they came.

They gathered under the twisted pine. They pressed together, and stood nearly motionless. Their voices were low, and little was said. Another bonfire was lighted. Clay Freeman was chosen judge, twelve men were selected and sat on a plank supported by kegs.

Hales stood before them and told of the cook who came, saying there was a letter at Fred's house, of how he went for the letter, and of what followed.

The cook, anxiously avowing his own innocence, told that Black Perry had sent him.

The miners who had been drunk and were now nearly sober told what they knew.

The young gambler repeated his story, babbling hopefully of how he had warned 'em.

Then the miners hanged him.

They appointed the jury as delegation to wait on Fred, though Fred stood there in the crowd, and tell him to get rid of those two women before sun-up, and never to bring any more into Fan Fare.

The miners then broke up into groups, went here and there quietly, had a few drinks, talked about Yank; and in the darkness returned to their claims, to their tents and cabins up and down the river.

Such, at times, was the summary Justice of '49.

TO BE CONTINUED

The Code of East and West

By Ralph R. Perry

Author of "The Proving of Old Man Lindquist," "The Atlantic takes a Hand," etc.

FIGURATIVELY speaking, the ink was not dry on Bart Nicholson's license when he was signed on as third mate of the twelve-thousand-ton cargo steamer *Kurdistan.* He was only twenty-three, it was his first job as an officer aboard ship, and he was hired so quickly after passing his examinations that he hadn't time to become accustomed even to the gold-lace on his sleeve. He kept glancing at it out of the corner of his eye as he walked, and the shiny yellow glitter of it went to his head like strong drink. The *Kurdistan* lay in the drydock at Newport News, Virginia. Nicholson pranced up the long gangway with a new cap on the back of his sleek, black head and a warm, tingling feeling that he was an officer, a person entitled to deference and respect, giving a swagger to his stride.

Mustapha met the new mate at the head of the gangway. Nicholson's eyes traveled from the gray, untasseled felt fez on one side of the Arab's head, to the black-and-white-checked sash the sailor wore instead of a belt, down to the felt slippers on his feet. Mustapha was a handsome, strapping Arab, six feet tall, his face as brown as a coffee berry. He was totally unimpressed by Nicholson and his shiny gold lace. Nicholson drew himself up to his full height—of five feet six; and the big Arab stared down on the little officer with the imperturbable self-sufficiency of the Oriental, without a flicker of interest.

"—— nigger. Thought this was a white man's ship," Nicholson muttered under his breath, and his shoulders jerked in a movement of impatience and distaste.

His swift glances forward and aft encountered other grave, soft-moving Arabs busy about the decks.

"Bet there ain't a white sailor on the ship," he whispered to himself. "—— cattle! Why don't they say something?"

It was a relief to the new mate to see an elderly white man advancing toward him, a dirty officer's cap barely hiding his gray-streaked blond hair.

"I'm Gustavsen, Chief Mate," boomed the newcomer. "You'll be Nicholson, the Third? Glad to see you, sir. Came aboard just as we needed you, you did. We're warping out of the dock immediately. You'll handle the lines aft, hey? Mustapha, get three men—" Gustavsen held up three fingers to make his meaning plain—"follow him."

A jerk of a blunt thumb indicated Nicholson.

"Ain't you got no white seamen?" asked the latter uncertainly.

He felt self-conscious, and he did not want to handle dirty hawsers in his brand new uniform.

"Naw," said Gustavsen, and then grinned. "All Arabs. Don't like them, hey? None of us do at first. But they're good men when you learn how to handle them, Nicholson. Better'n the white dock-rats we get nowadays. An Ay-rab sailor, lemme tell you, is somebody because he is a sailor.

We get the best men in the country. But don't yell at 'em, and remember they don't savvy much English. You'll get to like 'em. Well, let's go! Here's the tug."

But Nicholson, gloomily following Mustapha's felt slippers toward the poop, was positive he never would like 'em. While the water slowly filled the drydock he and the four Arabs waited on the poop without a word. No orders were required; the Arabs were thoroughly conversant with their duties.

At last the drydock gates swung aside; a fussy little tug puffed up and tossed the *Kurdistan* a line, for there was no steam up on the ship's main engines, so that she was unable to move from the dock under her own power. The tug backed with a churn of white water under her stern, and gave the ship a long, hard pull toward her new berth, alongside the pier about a hundred yards beyond the gate of the drydock. As soon as the big ship began to move through the water with momentum enough to carry her to her new position and the tug captain saw the ship's hawsers out on the pier ready to make her fast, he tooted for his own towline. Mustapha promptly cast it loose, and the tug went scooting away after the next job.

"You, Mustapha! Don't be in such a hurry. Let him toot," was Nicholson's sour reprimand.

The young third mate had all the deepwater seaman's dislike of tugboatmen, and his impatience with Arab sailors sharpened the reproof.

Mustapha straightened up, his expression hurt and bewildered, for he had expected praise for his alertness in responding to the tug's signal so quickly. In obedience to an irritated gesture from Nicholson, he moved sullenly to his post.

"Naw, not those bitts. Down the pier one time. That's it—there!"

Nicholson shouted, forgetting all about the brooding Arab beside him, and leaning far out over the rail to wave vigorously to a sailor on the pier, who had been about to throw the hawser over a post too far forward, without taking into account the fact that the ship was still moving.

"The heathen numskull," Nicholson muttered under his breath.

Arabs might be big and willing and anxious to please, but they were all alike. No brains. Cattle, hired because they were cheap, to keep white men out of a job. A white man, now—Nicholson grunted, and even in that moment of exasperation admitted to himself that most white sailors would have been just as stupid, and that the only reason few would have thrown off the tug's line without orders was that they wouldn't have thought or moved quickly enough.

Mustapha's haste really didn't make any difference. Both hawsers had now been made fast to bitts on the pier, and aboard ship the winches were busy taking up the slack. When the lines tautened they would swing the ship in alongside the pier very neatly, like a ball on the end of a string. So they would have done, had it not been for a fresh east wind, and if Chief Mate Gustavsen had not blundered on the forecastle.

The *Kurdistan* was a twelve thousand-ton ship, and though the tug had not set her moving much faster than a man might walk, a heavy ship, once in motion, is difficult to stop with hawsers alone. Moreover, the wind was pushing her, so that she did not lose her speed through the water after the departure of the tug. Seeing this, with frantic haste Gustavsen hauled in the line on the bow to check the ship's way—hauled it in so frantically that it was taut before he realized it and the full weight of the moving ship came on it in a sudden jerk.

Water flew from the hawser in a spray as the fibers tightened; it began to vibrate, faster and faster; loafers on the pier ran for their lives; and with a loud report the line parted and whipped viciously back after their scurrying figures.

Everything now depended on the stern line, for there was no time to get out another bow hawser. The speed of the ship had not been checked appreciably, and a hundred feet down the pier was a group of wooden boats, upon which the *Kurdistan* would drift, crushing them to kindling unless Nicholson succeeded in getting the ship under control.

The little mate's face was brick-red with excitement. He knew that he must take every pound of strain on his hawser that it would bear, and yet that at any cost he must avoid the sudden jerk which would snap it. He jumped to the throttle of the steam winch and stood ready.

He must slack out the hawser almost, but not quite, as fast as the ship was moving through the water. Only by letting out line could he avoid a breaking strain—and closer and closer under the stern loomed the frail wooden boats, their crews already leaping to the safety of the pier. Nicholson's hawser began to lift from the water. Now for it!

He reversed the winch, reeling out the line. Nevertheless, the hawser rose higher into the air; its curve was becoming a dangerous straight line. The winch, with throttle wide open, was not reeling out the line as fast as the ship moved.

* * *

HE MUST allow the hawser to slip over the revolving winch-drum. Risky stuff, that! Nicholson glanced up. Behind the winch stood Mustapha, holding the hawser in his hands and pulling back to keep the triple turn firmly against the revolving drum.

"Throw off a turn, Mustapha!" Nicholson yelled, raising both hands into the air in pantomine.

Obediently the Arab snapped off the top turn, and pulled back to keep the other turns taut. But now the hawser commenced to slip slightly around the drum, going out in sudden jerks, an inch or two of line at a time.

"Now watch it, you! Don't let it part," Nicholson shouted. "Stand clear, the rest of you. A busted hawser kicks worse than a mule!"

With a slight jerk that set a sharp wave running back and forth throughout its length the hawser had grown rigid. The water was squeezed out of it, and it jerked and jumped on the windlass. Mustapha's face was inscrutable, but his eyes shone with the fierce joy of a fighting man in a tight corner. Though he knew his position was one of considerable danger he pulled manfully on the hawser to hold it in place. Nicholson watched the center of the long line. No matter how much strain is placed on a rope, it will always sag a little, but despite the slack being given by the winch the strain was lifting the center, and the entire line was beginning to vibrate in one section between the ship and the pier. It would part in another second unless it got more slack.

"Surge it, Mustapha, surge it!" Nicholson shouted.

"Hi?" queried the Arab.

He did not understand, and pulled back harder on the line.

"Surge it! —— you, man, *surge it!*" screamed the mate.

Mustapha's eyes grew round, but he did not move. There was no time for more speech. In the emergency Nicholson jumped straight at his throat. The back of the mate's hand caught the Arab across the mouth, his shoulder threw the sailor staggering across the deck, and in his surprize Mustapha dropped the line, which Nicholson seized and flung forward, sending slack in loops of two and three feet at a time against the winch. The hawser began to slip in heavy jerks that shook the stern of the ship and threatened to tear the winch from its bed, but overside, the vibration of the line began to decrease. Slowly the speed of the ship lessened, it began to swing in toward the dock, and after a moment Nicholson put the hawser back in Mustapha's hands. With her stern ten feet from the wooden boats the *Kurdistan* swung in safely against the pier.

Nicholson wiped the sweat off his forehead with the back of his hand, gave a long whistle of relief, and turned toward Mustapha with a broad grin.

"That was a jam right," he began—and stopped abruptly at the expression of the Arab's face.

It was dusky red with anger. The lips were drawn away from the teeth, the eyes blazed, and Mustapha's right hand was fumbling in the checked black-and-white waist sash for a knife.

"Well, now what's eating you," Nicholson finished angrily.

"You hit," said Mustapha.

—— these niggers anyway, Nicholson thought. Controlling his temper with an effort, he smiled and shook his head slowly.

"No hit," he explained carefully. "You no understand him 'surge'? He means push out, give slack, so. No hit. Had to get you out of way, quick. Rope break, catch us both in neck, see."

"You hit," repeated Mustapha sullenly.

"Well, I'm sorry," snapped the mate. "I tell you I didn't meant to hit you—if I had I'd a-used my fist. I just had to get you out of the way in the hurry, that's all. Good lord, man, there wasn't time to palaver. That hawser would have gone in another split second."

He paused. Mustapha's hand had

dropped to his side, but his face was still ominous.

"Here, to show you there's no hard feelings, shake," said the mate, extending his hand. "I didn't hit you, Mustapha, I was just in a hurry."

Dubiously Mustapha took the extended hand, shook it for a second, and then turned away.

"Now it's all right, hey?" Nicholson called—it must be confessed, with relief. "All right, lively there! Stick out that breast line on the quarter. Pass your stern lines!"

Under his breath he muttered—

"—— touchy niggers."

Yet he considered the incident closed, and said nothing about it when he met Gustavsen later. The old Swede, who had commanded Arab seamen for years, would have explained that to Mustapha a blow was not a matter to be wiped away by words or forgiven because of a hand-clasp. But it was Nicholson's first night aboard, the accident gave them much to talk over, and the third mate had already dismissed as trivial an incident over which he would have talked for hours had it occurred at sea.

Nothing occurred to recall it to his mind during the twelve days the *Kurdistan* remained in port loading cargo. Nicholson was extremely busy, intense in his desire to make good in his first job; and as the new man, upon him was thrown much of the routine and watch duty during the lading. His free time he spent pottering about the ship, learning her, roving through the hold. studying old stowage plans, inspecting and examining deck gear fore and aft that some sudden night emergency might find him prepared, and ready to operate any machinery without a glimmer of light to aid him.

There were hundreds of matters to inspect and remember in the intervals of stowing cargo. If, as Nicholson wandered about the decks, dark eyes watched him sidelong; if tall, grave seamen were silent when he approached and muttered to one another when he passed, he never perceived it. He noticed, and approved of the fact that these big Arabs had more weight when they pulled on a line than the ordinary under-sized white sailor, that they were, comparatively, economical with paint; that once they understood their orders they did not require watching, but labored with unhurried thoroughness.

Their foreign language bothered him, he missed the old broad jokes, the familiar growls about work and food; their food was strange and their personal gear, as he saw it in the forecastle, outlandish—but at the end of a week Nicholson grudgingly admitted they were good men, and Mustapha was the best of them. The big Arab was more quiet than his mates, his eyes brooded, and his air of dogged sullenness marked him even among his reserved silent shipmates. But nevertheless in the course of a week Mustapha had won his position as the leading seaman in Nicholson's watch, and as such, when the *Kurdistan* put to sea for Marseilles Nicholson ordered the Arab up the mainmast to secure the cargo booms of the after hatches for sea.

As they dropped the pilot off Cape Charles Virginia, the wind hauled easterly, and a gray bank of nimbus clouds slid across the sun and commenced to settle down and darken. Rain would fall soon, and aft all hands were working at top speed to complete the job of battening down the hatches before foul weather. The ten-foot steel strong-backs which span the hatches were swung into place, and the cargo boom was pulled up straight against the mast, to the base of which it was pivoted, like the boom of a derrick. While Nicholson and his gang sweated to slide the wooden hatch-covers into place Mustapha climbed the mast and began to lash the booms.

Nicholson kept an eye on the Arab as the seaman passed a rope around mast and boom to hold the latter in place while a permanent lashing could be fastened, for if anything went wrong the unsupported boom would fall, endangering the men working below. But Mustapha tied his knot without accident, and immediately afterward the men on deck began to have difficulty in placing a section of hatch-cover. As soon as he saw the temporary strap passed, Nicholson gave all his attention to the work going on around him.

THE Arabs worked silently. Now and then one would mutter a few words to the man beside him, in a foreign tongue, without meeting his eyes. All walked on their toes, as alert as cats. The first of the hatch battens, a strip of steel fifteen feet long, two inches wide, and half an inch thick, which is wedged alongside of a hatch to make the canvas cover water-tight at the edges, was put in place. In another five minutes the job would be over, but apparently during the stay in port the batten for the after end of the hatch had been accidently bent. The ends slipped into place, but the center was bent too far out to engage in its cleat.

"Shove him in. Push him hard," Nicholson ordered.

Two Arabs bent their backs, the batten bent, but there came the click of steel on steel as it struck the top of the cleat.

"No can do," reported a tall sailor apathetically.

"You're a fine lot of fat-heads," Nicholson jeered. "Here, go get me a hand spike —a big wood bar, savvy?"

He took the bar and jumped on top of the hatch. Setting his feet firmly on the canvas of the hatch covering the mate threw his full weight on the bar in the effort to force the batten into place. It bent toward him an inch. There was a quarter of an inch still to gain. He pulled harder, his face reddening in the effort, ashamed to admit to these big men that he was too small to bend the batten alone. He gained a bit.

"Stand by— to push it into the cleats" he panted, glancing toward the seaman at his right.

The man's figure was rigid.

It was that, the tenseness not called for by the weight of the light batten in his hand; the strained gray pallor under his brown skin; the crouching, wincing shoulders, the involuntary flick of the eyes upward, that made Nicholson leap desperately aside.

Simultaneously with his headlong dive came a nervous "Hi!" of shouted warning from aloft, a rush of air and a thunderous, splintering crash as the cargo boom hurtled downward in a stiff arc to slam against the deck. It struck the handspike with which Nicholson had been working, sent it whirring through the air. Dust rose, and with it the end of the heavy cargo boom, snapped short in half five feet below its tip, rebounded from the wall of the well deck and dropped like a log across Nicholson's legs.

He lay sprawled face downward on the deck, where his frantic leap had taken him. Blood was running from a cut lip, he was dizzy with the shock with which his head had landed, the pain in his leg numbed him. He cried out as brown hands lifted the cargo boom away, and rolling on to his back collected all his strength to stop the dizzy march of the mainmast round and round before his eyes. Slowly his senses cleared. Mustapha was peering down from the crosstrees, his eyes wide and white in a pallid face. One arm clung tightly around the mainmast, the other, extended toward the deck as though to ward off a blow, was trembling spasmodically. Catching the Arab's eye Nicholson managed to grin feebly.

"Tell him I ain't much hurt," he whispered to the Arab boatswain, Ali, in whose arms he lay. "Clumsy idiot, can't he tie a knot?"

The Arab shouted something in his own language. On the mast Mustapha started, and his mouth fell open. Then, shouting something in reply, he started to descend to the deck.

"He say the rope break, sar," Ali translated.

"Break ——," Nicholson contradicted. "Ship ain't rollin'. Nothing to put any strain on it with the boom standing straight up that way. But never mind. Carry me to my room."

As they obeyed, the mate's eye traveled to the mast, and there, sure enough, he saw the strap hanging, its frayed end eloquent of a broken line.

"It's —— queer," he muttered, half to himself, but still loud enough for Ali to overhear him. "If it'd been a block that dropped I'd think he was trying to get me. You can't bust an inch and a quarter line that way. But—why, we shook hands after that fuss!"

The knot of men carrying Nicholson turned sidewise to go up the starboard alleyway, and he could see Mustapha talking volubly, his hands darting as he explained the accident to the Chief Mate.

Fifteen minutes afterward the latter entered Nicholson's room, and carefully closed the door.

"You're a lucky ——, Nicholson. Bust up one of my booms and get off with nothing worse than a sprained ankle. Old Man said he wasn't even sure it was sprained, an' now you'll be restin' easy on your back while we stand your watches, hey?"

Nicholson was feeling much better, thanks to two hearty drinks under his belt. He sat up in bed and lit a cigaret cheerfully.

"If you feel that way about it go out and drop that log on your own foot. How'd it happen?" he inquired.

For some seconds Gustavsen did not

answer. He pushed his cap onto the back of his graying head, fished in his pocket for a stubby brass-bound pipe, filled it slowly with tarry-looking tobacco, and struck a match on his thumbnail. Five or six long puffs he drew in silence, staring out through the porthole beside Nicholson's head, with the stem of the pipe gripped in his right fist.

"Mustapha says the strap broke. He showed me both pieces. They fit. It broke," he remarked drily.

"I saw the busted end hanging from the mast myself," said Nicholson.

"Didn't happen to see the strap before Mustapha went aloft with it," demanded the mate, his blue eyes keen and hard. "I looked 'em over, myself. You wouldn't know the strap if you saw it, hey?"

Nicholson shook his head, his eyes narrowing as he tried to puzzle out what the mate was driving at.

"No?" Gustavsen went on. "Well, you're a steamship man. Never served in sail—too young. Rope means nothin' in your life, hey?"

"But what difference does it make what rope it was?" asked Nicholson.

The mate pulled his pipe out of his mouth and leaned forward.

"Nicholson, that Ay-rab, Mustapha, is a sailor. He showed me a busted strap. All right. But I never heard of a cargo boom taking charge before, did you? No. An' it ain't like Mustapha to take a piece of rope that was weak for that job. Sailors are careless; but not Arabs, not that way. An'—" the stem of Gustavsen's pipe rapped out each word on the edge of the berth— "because the strap he shows was busted don't prove to me it was the one Mustapha secured that boom with. He might've had it hid in his sash—if you've had any trouble with him. Have you?"

"Not to speak of," Nicholson answered hesitatingly. "I had to push him away from the winch when your line parted, and he gave me some lip about it."

Gustavsen gave a short nod.

"So that's what's been wrong the last week," he remarked, partly to himself. "I could feel it in the air, Nicholson. Arabs ain't naturally any sourer than any other kind of sailors. Gave you lip, hey? What did you do?"

"Just shoved him away from the winch. He said I hit him, but I just shoved him with the heel of my hand in his jaw to get him out of the way in a hurry. He shook hands on it afterward—wasn't anything to try to kill me about?"

"So?" said Gustavsen. He began to smoke, nodded his gray head slowly. "Never hit an Ay-rab sailor, Nicholson," he continued softly. "If I'd a-known about it, I'd put ye ashore on the beach. We can't get rid of Mustapha, you see. Immigration authorities wouldn't let us."

"But—"

Gustavsen held up his hand for silence.

"I'LL tell you why. An Ay-rab, now, ain't got no sense of humor. He don't know any kind of fight but a finish fight, and he don't shake hands where he comes from. If you hit an Ay-rab you've got to kill him—because he figures he's insulted, and he'll kill you if he can. He thinks of course you know it, and are trying to get him, too. Mustapha carried that strap up the mast in his belt, waiting a chance to push that boom on your head—and what gets me mad is that every Arab on deck knew about it. Didn't yell till it would have been too late, did they? Well. They figured you knew Mustapha was insulted, it was up to you to take care o' yourself. Nicholson, for a fact, you're lucky as ——."

"But that's —— nonsense," cried Nicholson.

"Not with men from east of Suez, it ain't," said Gustavsen earnestly. "You've got a blood feud with Mustapha, Nicholson, or he has one with you, which is about the same thing. When we get across the Atlantic we'll discharge him, but until then you watch your step. He won't use a knife, 'cause he's more afraid of being hung than a white man, something in their religion, maybe. But when he gets a chance to kill you and get away with it, like he did this morning— Watch out for blocks from aloft. Keep away from the rail on dark nights. Don't go into the focsle alone, boy. Remember, the crew and the black gang's all Arab, and they all think Mustapha's got a right to kill you. You act according."

"You mean I gotta kill him myself?" asked Nicholson, aghast.

The Chief Mate shook his head, but blew a long cloud of smoke at the ceiling.

"I wouldn't be blaming you, myself," he said quietly. "But you can be hanged, too, you know, and no perjury goes into our log. I've logged Mustapha a week's pay for carelessness. Officially, that ends it. We can't prove nothing. As to what happens in the future, son, use your judgment."

For the next forty-eight hours Nicholson lay on his back recovering from a badly bruised leg and a slightly sprained ankle and cursing the luck which had made him shipmates with a potential murderer. He itched to toss back the bedding, pull on his clothes, and walk forward to confront Mustapha face to face on the open forward deck, where there was plenty of clear space. Whether, when he met the Arab, they fought it out on the spot or shook hands and joked about the whole affair Nicholson didn't care, but this stalking a man around a dark deck with the fear of a knife in your back to drive you forward and the shadow of a hangman's noose to hold you back, didn't appeal to his temperament. But all such downright methods of settling the feud were discouraged by Gustavsen, and when Nicholson did unexpectedly resume duty in the Atlantic, two days out of Newport News, his only concession to circumstances was to slip a revolver in his hip pocket.

That he appeared on deck at the unexpected and unorthodox time of two thirty A.M. was due to no plan of his. He had not intended to take his watch again until eight o'clock on the following morning, but just after sundown that night, a nasty, choppy sea blew up out of the northeast. It was only a moderate gale, but it sent short, steep combers slapping against the *Kurdistan* about three points forward of the beam, so that the vessel rolled and pitched and staggered about like an old woman crossing a crowded street with a heavy basket. The masts pulled at their backstays, the heave and snap of the sea set all the loose deck gear creaking, and about four bells in the midwatch a seaman reported that the life boat carried swung out on the port quarter had torn loose from its grips, and was trying to smash itself to pieces against the davits as the ship pitched. The mate on watch gave orders to secure it, and after a half-hearted try—for it was a nasty job in the dark, with the seas jumping up into the circle of lantern light after you, the life boat swaying like a mad thing and trying to knock you over the side at every roll—the man reported he couldn't do it. So the mate, unable to leave the bridge himself, and not caring to bother the Old Man, sent the sailor to ask Nicholson if he couldn't secure the life boat, please.

Nicholson swore at the man for waking him up, yawned, and stepped grumblingly out on the deck to finish the job as quickly as possible and get back to his berth. By that time it was raining. The lanterns of the sailors cast a few circles of yellow, half-drowned light, and the sea had risen till heavy sheets of spray flew across the deck into the men's faces at every roll.

"We ought to rig the —— thing in," Nicholson growled—because that would have been a much easier job.

The life boat was hanging just clear of the ship's side, with its keel swinging back and forth about two feet above the deck. Between the curved iron davits from which it was suspended was lashed a spar four inches thick. From the spar the grips, triple bands of four-inch canvas, passed over and around the boat at bow and stern, meeting beneath the keel to form a V. At that point the grips ended in a rope lashing and a hook, which now had to be fastened into an eye bolt in the deck, pulling the boat firmly in against the spar.

"Well, don't stand there, owl-eyes," Nicholson growled. "Crawl under the boat, one of you, and grab the grips with a boat hook. Bring 'em in, hook on, and secure. What the —— did the Second bother me for?"

"The lashing is broke. The hook, he is lost, sar," replied a quiet voice.

Nicholson lifted his lantern, and peered under the brim of the man's sou'wester. It was Mustapha. The mate's lips hardened.

"Oh, it did, eh?" he sneered. "You pass that lashing, Mustapha?"

The seaman recoiled a step, though his eyes did not falter.

"No, sar," he replied gravely.

"Bring me a line," the mate snapped.

A rope was thrust into his hand, and he pulled a knife from his pocket and cut off a piece about ten feet long, which he tossed to the Arab.

"All right, since you're so good at tying knots, make that fast to the end of the grips, and toss the end over the side."

Mustapha climbed heavily into the boat, awkward in his big rubber boots. His back could be seen moving about as he drew in the grips, and after a moment, he straightened up, the free end of the rope in his hand.

"I pass him outside the boat, and give him to Selim?" he suggested.

It was the easiest and simplest way of getting the line beneath the boat.

"You heard me. Toss it over the side," Nicholson ordered coldly.

In the darkness and rain, beneath the dense shadow of his hat, Mustapha's face was indistinguishable, but for a moment he hesitated, standing upright in the boat, swaying easily with it as it moved like a pendulum to the ship's roll, holding the end of the rope in his hand. At last Nicholson saw the sailor's shoulders shrug beneath the oilskins, and Mustapha tossed the rope away with the moody indifference of the born fatalist.

"That's well. Git down, take a boat hook, crawl under the boat, and bring it inboard," Nicholson directed with a savage relish. "And I hope the boat gives you a healthy crack in the bean while you're at it," he whispered under his breath.

Mustapha moved leisurely. It took him fully a minute to find the boat hook, though it was lying on the thwarts directly under his hand. He swung his booted feet one by one to the deck, and then, after one swift glance at his fellow Arabs, who were standing motionless in the rain, he bent his back to crawl under the boat. It swung to meet him as the ship rolled, and his head struck it with a hollow thump, while a dash of spray slapped into Nicholson's face and started him spitting to get the salt off his lips.

He had heard, and ignored, the half audible hiss of indrawn breath from the seamen as he gave Mustapha his last order, but the force with which the spray struck him, and the glimpse of the solid crest of the last wave, which had come within three feet of the unguarded rail, made him change his mind. One could carry hazing too far.

"Here, come back," he snapped. "Don't you know enough to tie a rope around your waist when you start on a job like that? Thought you was a sailor!"

WITHOUT a word the Arab fastened the end of a heaving line about his body, and disdainfully tossed the other end to a shipmate who stood at the opposite end of the life boat, the man farthest away from the mate. He then dropped on hands and knees to crawl beneath the boat, pushing the boat hook ahead of him. Nicholson bent down to watch, and as he did so the lantern light was thrown directly into Mustapha's face. Instinctively Nicholson recoiled, and his right hand streaked for his hip pocket, for the bloodshot glare in the Arab's eyes spelled murder.

Twice the *Kurdistan* rolled, and twice a blinding volley of spray dashed into the set faces of the two men while they crouched motionless, one holding the boat hook like a spear, the other stooping with an open jack knife in his left hand, and his right on the butt of his gun. Then, with a grunt Mustapha crawled to the rail and began to fish for the hanging line; without much success, for his eyes never left Nicholson's.

He was waiting, and prepared, for the mate to make a rush, for an "accidental" slash of the jack knife to sever the rope about his waist, for a shove that would be fatal, balanced precariously as he was on the edge of the slippery deck.

The Arab's attention was centered so absolutely on Nicholson that he forgot the sea and the life boat swinging over his head. A wave struck the ship squarely. The *Kurdistan* staggered, and Mustapha was thrown off his balance—only a little, but enough to make his foot slip. His leg shot out over the side, and as the ship rolled his whole body began to slide toward the sea. Even then he might have saved himself if Nicholson had not scrambled forward on hands and knees to his rescue, for he could have flattened himself to the deck and held on with his hands. Instead, in terror, he rose on one elbow and reached for his knife—and the swinging keel of the life boat caught him alongside the head and toppled him neatly over the side.

"Man overboard," Nicholson bawled; horrified, and yet with a sharp thrill of relief in his heart.

If the heaving line held—which it wouldn't—Mustapha would be crushed against the ship's side or cut to pieces by the screw. If it broke he would drown instantly, hampered as he was with boots and oilskins. The feud was over.

But to the mate's amazement the heaving line remained slack, and looking down, he saw that as he fell Mustapha had caught the rope hanging from the grips, and was now suspended by the grip of his hands from the very end of the line. A sea picked him up and swung him heavily against the ship's side. One hand slipped and seized again, and as his head emerged from the water Mustapha looked up into the mate's face.

He looked up without either a plea for mercy or the last futile venom of a drowning rat. Mustapha couldn't hang there long. He knew it. If he expected the mate to do anything, it was to cut the rope. There was no eye to see; no one could swear how long it had been. So be it! It was fate; he would die without complaint or outcry.

But Nicholson had never hesitated. Even while the thought was passing through his head that it would be everlastingly easy and safe to let Mustapha drown, he had thrown himself out over the side, caught the boat grips, and let himself down hand over hand until he could hook his legs under Mustapha's shoulders.

"Haul us up! Into the boat and haul us up!" he yelled.

He was banged against the side. A spasm of pain shot through his injured ankle, Mustapha's weight was dragging his arms from their sockets.

"Climb, Mustapha. They'll be too slow," he panted.

The Arab understood, and raised himself, so that Nicholson was able to gain an inch, only to lose it when the next sea sent them both spinning against the side of the ship and tore the rope through his fingers.

"Can you reach the rope with your feet?" he gasped.

"No, sar," came Mustapha's muffled voice.

"Well, hang on!"

A boat hook banged against his head, slipped up, and caught the rope. The dangling men were pulled against the ship's side, and slammed by a sea. Looking upward, Nicholson saw two Arabs leaning downward, one hand gripping the life boat's gunwale, the other on the rope—and he thanked the God that had made them big men, broad in the shoulder.

"If their hands slip—I'm going to let go," he promised himself.

But, a foot at a time, they drew him over the side, his legs still locked under Mustapha's shoulders. Back under the life boat they pulled him, and out on to the deck.

"Ya got that rope now. Secure the life boat," Nicholson panted.

He sat up on deck, nursing his ankle in both hands.

"I think it's broke, this time," he groaned—and was aware that Mustapha was squatting at his side.

"You foot broke? I sorry," said the Arab gravely, and paused to wipe the salt water from his lips with the back of his hand.

Nicholson could see the man's great chest pumping as the Arab panted for air, and tried to catch Mustapha's eye; but the seaman kept his face averted.

"Mustapha your slave," he declared.

It was a simple statement of fact.

"You no hit—maybe you shake hands?"

"Aw, what's the difference," Nicholson replied in embarrassment, wincing at the grip of Mustapha's brown fingers.

"All sahibs are mad, as all know," Mustapha muttered, half to himself. "We carry you below, sar?"

The Blindness of the Heathen

A Complete Novelette

By

L. Patrick Greene

Author of "The Flame," "—and of Gideon," etc.

ALFRED GOLDING was in an evil temper. For the first time since he first came to the South African diamond fields twenty years ago—he was then called Abraham Goldstein—his star had seemed on the wane.

First, the Powers that Be had refused to renew his diamond mining license and had made it very plain, when Golding complained about the injustice of it all, that only the strange disappearance of an important witness saved him from being arrested and convicted *and* sentenced to many years at hard labor for illicit diamond buying.

Characteristically, Golding mourned the loss of revenue—legal and otherwise—resulting from the withdrawal of his license instead of congratulating himself on his escape from punishment. But, after all, there was nothing astonishing or cause for congratulation about that! He was not likely to forget his clever foresight in arranging for the murder of the witness. The price had been too high.

Hard on this first misfortune came the report that the manager of his largest trading store—it was situated on the border of Portuguese territory—had decamped with a year's profits and all the trade goods; and it was no consolation to Golding to remember that he had taken his first step up the ladder of success in very much thesame way.

Again: The same mail brought him news that three more of his stores had been closed by the police and their managers fined heavily for selling rot-gut gin—it would raise a blister on the hide of a bush-pig—to the natives. Here, too, Golding's liberty was endangered but, luckily for him, each of the managers swore that the selling of the liquor was not authorized by their employer. He had to pay heavily for their loyalty!

And, proving that misfortunes do, sometimes, come in threes, a "blackbirding" expedition which he had planned and financed went sadly awry. The first part of the scheme—and it was really very clever—had been successfully carried out. Five hundred natives had been duped into leaving their kraals and signing contracts to work in the mines on the Rand. However, the man in charge of the expedition did not deliver the natives to the mines named by Golding; he placed them elsewhere, pocketed all of the commission and thumbed his nose insolently at Golding.

So no wonder Alfred Golding found no flavor in the brandy and soda mixed for him by Violet, the most popular barmaid of Kimberly's most popular bar, and failed to reward her gold-tooth smile by telling her to keep the change; and no wonder he irritably refused the coaxing endearments of certain ladies who may have wished to dance with him, but who most certainly desired that some of his wealth should be transferred to their bottomless purses.

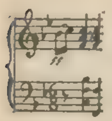
When, seeing that their coaxing failed to move him, they began to taunt him and point cattish fingers at a couple who were dancing in a far corner of the room, Golding overawed and silenced them with a string of slimey curses.

Golding emptied his glass, ordered another drink and retired with it to a table. He sat with his face to the wall as if he desired to express his contempt of the riotous dancing and drunken antics of the other habitués of the bar. But hanging on the wall before him was a small mirror in which he stared covertly and, when the two dancers to whom the girls had called his attention moved into his field of vision, he cursed softly.

He tried to deceive himself that the woman—she was red-haired and there was something piggish about the set of her blue eyes—was the cause of his moody anger, He had given her every luxury her greedy soul demanded; he had showered diamonds upon her. And yet she had left him tonight for a perfect stranger who looked as if he were the offspring of the Witch of Endor.

Her fickleness, Golding told himself, was cause enough for any man to give way to righteous anger. To see a beautiful girl like Bessie—and she was beautiful if you could forget her eyes and the sneering set of her full lips—taken from you without as much as a "by your leave" by a perfect stranger. It rather pleased Golding to think that a woman's inconstancy was the cause of his wrath; therein he was reacting as the man he thought himself to be should; he was growling like a red-blooded he-man because his woman had been taken from him. He would go further than growling as soon as he could find a man to do the job for him—the stranger looked like a tough customer. Golding always managed to get his honor satisfied—at a price.

And at that thought he groaned aloud. Money! That's all he'd been doing lately—paying out and nothing coming in.



THE music suddenly stopped with a crash and the musician hastily left the room—to cough outside the door; the men returned to their tables or lined up along the bar; the women fluttered purposefully about the room.

Golding stiffened slightly and his eyes dropped from the mirror as he caught a glimpse of red-haired Bessie and her cadaverous-visaged partner walking across to his table. He jumped with well-simulated surprize when Bessie put a caressing hand on his shoulder and kissed him on the bald spot which he vainly essayed to hide by brushing over it a long lock of his thinning hair.

"An' what's my Alfie doing here all by his little self?" she asked with a mincing sweetness. "Tell momma, precious."

He looked up with a scowl.

"An' vot the —— is it to you, vot I do, or vhy?"

She laughed at the insult and her companion grinned his appreciation.

"Naughty, naughty!" Bessie exclaimed. "You shouldn't use such bad language, Alfie, when momma's been doing everything for your sake. Mr. Fraser—this here is Mr. Fraser—" she paused breathlessly, looking expectantly from one man to the other, but when Golding studiously ignored Frazer's half-military salute, she continued hastily—"Mr. Fraser wants to talk business with you, Alfie. He was going to old 'Grunty' Jones, but I persuaded him to come to you. There!"

Golding looked up now with some show of interest.

"I suppose you want to borrow money, eh?" he sneered.

"Scotchmen don't usually borrow money from Jews," Fraser said heavily. "I'll lend you some though—at good interest."

Golding chuckled and his fat, white hands fluttered before his face.

"If you're a Scotchman, I'm a-a-Irishman; an' I ain't," he said. "But I don't vant to borrow money, mister. Not while I've got these."

He indicated with a nod of his head the diamond rings which covered his fingers.

Fraser looked at them contemptuously.

"I didn't come to borrow or loan, Golding." He barely opened his lips, the words seemed to trickle out of the corner of his slit of a mouth. "I came to talk business."

"Yah! You said that before, mister. An' the business is?"

Fraser looked around cautiously and then, in a lower voice—

"I can put you on to getting a lot more and better stones than those you're so proud of."

Golden leaned back in his chair and laughed uproariously. His face grew red;

his bulgy eyes protruded even more from their sockets; his head rocked back and forth until it seemed about to part with his bull-like neck, and his enormous belly heaved convulsively.

"Go avay, man," he gasped presently. "Go avay, or you'll be the death of me. I ain't interested in I. D. B., Mister Bloomin' Detective."

Turning to Bessie, Golding added vindictively—

"Try to frame me, vould you?"

She resented that and would have answered hotly had not the man Fraser clapped his hand over her mouth and told her in a fierce whisper to "Shut your jaw!" She subsided, and collapsed sulkily into a near by chair but brightened up immediately when a very drunken prospector, apparently well-supplied with money, caught her eye.

Fraser smiled meaningly and then turned from the woman to Golding.

"I'm not trying to sell you I. D. B's and I'm not a detective trying to frame you. Far from it!" He laughed softly. "I've got a straight-up and above-board proposition to make to you. As 'Red-head' told you, I was on my way to Grunty Jones, but when she told me you were in town and had a lot of money with which to talk business, why, I decided to try you first. And there was one other thing in your favor: I knew you understood how to manage niggers—Jones don't."

"I ought to understand them," Golding interposed. "I lived alone among 'em for nearly five years."

Fraser acknowledged the information with an impatient nod.

"Of course. I know all about that. The question now is: Do we talk business or do I have to go to Jones?"

"How can I talk business if I don't know vot your business is?" Golding complained plaintively.

"That's soon remedied. It's—" Fraser hesitated.

"Vell! Spit it out."

"No. Not here. Can't we get to some more private place?"

Golding looked at him shrewdly; he was still suspicious.

"There's my office," he said slowly, his eyes still fixed on the other. "Ve could talk there and nobody 'd interfere with us."

Fraser moved away from the table, toward the door.

"All right," he said.

From the tone of his voice he didn't seem to care over much whether he did business with Golding or not; certainly he did not display the eagerness Golding figured a detective springing a frame would have shown, and the fat Jew's suspicions were allayed.

"Vait!"

Fraser turned back toward the table, surprized that Golding had not yet risen.

"Aren't you coming?" he asked. "Oh, I see! You don't like to leave the lady!"

"That's it," Golding agreed with a smirk.

"You don't need to bother about your old momma, Alfie, darling," Bessie cooed contentedly. "I'll be just perfectly happy sittin' here a-thinkin' of you until you come back."

Bessie had succeeded in exchanging winks with the prospector who was not so drunk that he could not admire her charms.

"No. You'll come with us, Bessie," Golding said firmly.

He knew Bessie! Besides, he had missed very little of her flirtation, he was still facing the mirror.

Rising laboriously, he offered her his arm. She hesitated a moment, pouting childishly, then jumped to her feet, linked her arm in his and announced her readiness to depart.

"I ain't got no sympathy when men who are careless with their valuables get robbed," Golding announced as they left the bar. "Now me—when I ain't wearing my diamonds I keep 'em in a strong box. Anything which I own vot is valuable I keeps in a safe place when I ain't using it. Safe bind, safe find, says I." And he tightened his grip on Bessie's arm.

Ten minutes later they halted before a low, tin-roofed building—in the half-light of the star-strewn sky there was nothing to distinguish it from the hundreds of other tin-roofed buildings which were Kimberley. After much fumbling with keys Golding opened the door. They all entered—he closed and locked the door again.

For a moment they waited in the darkness and there was no sound save Golding's heavy breathing.

The light of a match cut the darkness, flickered and went out. A muttered curse from Golding, another match—and then the soft yellow light of a large, hanging lamp disclosed the luxurious, almost oriental furnishings of Golding's office.

The decorator had studied comfort and the voluptuous taste of its owner. The draperies, the riot of exotic colors stupefied, cloyed the senses already dulled by the ease of the stupendous divans and overstuffed chairs. A man, even one of such elephantine proportions as Golding, would move noiselessly about the place; all footfalls were deadened by the thick, velvet rug. Mysterious looking arched doorways broke the expanse of walls, suggesting a multitude of rooms leading off this one.

"Now we can talk business, mister," Golding said and sank down with a sigh of satisfaction into one of the chairs.

Bessie had thrown herself upon one of the divans and closed her eyes.

II

GOLDING chuckled gleefully as Fraser, an expression of complete bewilderment on his face, looked curiously about the room.

"You like my little office, ain't it?" he asked proudly.

"It's not that," Fraser announced contemptuously. "But I don't quite understand. You're Alfred Golding, all right, aren't you?"

"Of course. Don't be a —— fool."

Golding was beginning to suspect the other's sanity and he quite regretted the impulse which had led him to suggest that they adjourn to his office for their business talk.

"I'm Golding, all right," he continued. "Vot's ailing you? Who vas you beginning to think I vas?"

Fraser shook his head impatiently.

"I didn't think to see a place like this belonging to you, that's all. You've got the reputation of being a tough customer and the man who lived—as I know you lived—among the natives for so many years don't seem to fit into this place.

"Vhy shouldn't I live in comfort? An' this ain't nothing to vot my house in Jo'burg is like, is it, Bessie?"

"It's not one-two-three to this," she agreed.

"Listen, Fraser; all them years I lived with the niggers, sleepin' on the ground or on my deal counter of my store, covered with the cheap, cotton blankets I used for trade, eating sloppy mealie-meal three times a day, not smokin' or drinkin' but savin' all the time—"

"And cheating the niggers," Fraser interjected.

Golding nodded impatiently.

"Of course—vhy not? They'd have cheated me if they'd had brains enough to do it. Anyvay, all that time, as I vas saying, I had this room an' my house in Jo'burg in my mind's eye. Vhen I vas most miserable, most uncomfortable and hungry an' tired, I cheered myself up by telling myself that some day I'd live in the lap of luxury. An' vot I said then's come true. But all that's no never mind," he continued, sobering quickly. "Let's talk business. Vot are you pottering about them doors for?"

"How do I know there isn't some one in the other rooms listening?"

Golding laughed again.

"Oh, that's vot's bothering you, eh? Look at 'em close, mister, an' you'll see they're all false doors—they look nice, not? But there ain't no other rooms. Outside this one there ain't nothing but the street an' vacant lots."

Fraser tried one of the doors, examined it closely and then, rather sheepishly, sat down in a chair close to Golding.

"You know Macombe's country?" he began without further hesitation.

"I ought to. I tried to trade there vunce upon a time—it vas when I was first starting out in business for myself—and the fat old fool kicked me out. It's a vonder he didn't have his warriors stick me with assegais, he vas so mad."

"It's a wonder he didn't," Fraser agreed tersely. "He doesn't like traders—or any white men, for the matter of that, except a couple of hand-picked ones who are living there now—mucking about his country, and he's always had a bad reputation with traders and prospectors and missionaries and the like—treating them all as he treated you. He was able to do pretty much as he liked, too, without fear of getting Government troops after him; his has been a closed district—up to now." He looked meaningly at Golding and repeated, "Up to now."

"Vell?" Golding asked, seeing something was expected of him. "Vell? Vot of it?"

"What of it? This: It won't be known outside official circles, for a few months, maybe longer, that old Macombe is no longer the paramount chief. There was some mix-up with the Portuguese, I don't know the right of that, but, anyway, I do know that Macombe's hand was forced and that he had to do what he'd always sworn he would not do—appeal to the British for help and ask them to proclaim a protectorate over his district. Then he abdicated in favor of one of his nephews who calls himself a Christian. And you know what that means!"

Golding grinned. His opinion of native converts to Christianity was a little lower—if that were possible—than his opinion of the raw, unlettered savage.

"Vell, go on. You ain't told me nothing yet worth while leaving the bar."

"I'm coming to it," Fraser said patiently. "Let me tell it in my own way. I want you to get everything straight.

"All right, then. It's one thing to ask the British to assume a protectorate but it's a horse of another color—sometimes—to get them to do it. This happens to be one of the 'sometimes.' There's a hitch somewhere. Course they'll take the district over eventually, but first a lot of red tape has to be unwound, questions asked in parliament, special commissions formed and all that. But what's the state of the district in the meantime? I ask you?"

"Vell, you've asked me," Golding exclaimed irritably. "Vot's the answer?"

Fraser leaned back in his chair, pressed the tips of his long, lean fingers together and smiled complacently.

"I'll tell you," he said didactically. "First of all, Macombe—the old chief—has got no power any longer. He's a has-been; he's got no more authority than a headman of a small kraal. And what does that mean?"

"——, man," Golding said angrily, "vot do you think I am? I ain't a school kid; I don't vant to guess riddles, I vant to know the answers."

Fraser waved his hands, and continued calmly:

"This nephew of Macombe's, the new chief, he's a meek ewe lamb from all accounts, ripe for the shearing. His name's M'boza, but he calls himself Adam because he was the first man to be a Christian up there. He thinks he's the Almighty and at least as good as any white man. He's developed a lot of traits which he hid carefully before old Macombe handed over the reins to him.

"Treat him like a brother, pat him on the back, give him a bottle of square-face and he'll hand over all the concessions you want. And even if he wanted to be ugly, he daren't. He's afraid of the white police; he's afraid if he does anything out of the way—like having a trader or two killed or run out of the country—that the British will force him to abdicate and appoint another chief. You see, he's not an independent chief, like old Macombe was. He and his people think the British have already taken over. They don't understand all the red tape business; they don't know that the British won't interfere—unless some other Power gets greedy—until they've formally taken over."

Golding's eyes glistened.

"An' you vant me to send you up there to trade, is that it? I've a good mind to. But vot's the use? You'd probably svindle me like all the others an', anyhow, the government'll have somebody to advise this young fool of a chief. The pickin's 'ud be very small—legal an' above-board business don't buy diamonds."

"I tell you that there'll be no government representative in the district—except one trooper of the B. S. A. P., who patrols through it occasionally—until the protectorate has been formally announced," Fraser said quietly. "And the pickings'll be big, —— big. Storekeeping's small stuff to what I have in mind, though you might run one or two as a side line."

"You mean blackbirding then?"

"No! Unless you want another side line."

"Selling dope, is that it?" Golding rubbed his hands. "There's a lot of money in that. Quick sales and big returns. If a man's on to his job, given a free hand in a open district like vot you say Macombe's is, he ought to make a fortune in a few weeks. You're always sure of return customers with dope, and every new customer you make is your agent. He'll do any —— thing you order."

Fraser shook his head vehemently and an expression of intense disgust crossed over his face.

"No!" he said thoughtfully. "I don't think I'd peddle drugs up there, if I were you. It's nasty stuff to handle and I'm afraid of it. It has a kick-back to it, a recoil—"

"Squeamish, eh?" Golding chuckled.

"Gettin' moral, eh? Vell, I ain't likely to ask you to handle the stuff. Then vot are you a-drivin' at? Gun-running? That's always big money. If things are as you say we could run a big consignment up there an' be avay again before the government pokes in its nose. You're an artful one, you are. Trust you for picking big money business an'—"

He stopped short, frightened by the hard, angry light in Fraser's eyes.

"Vell?" he exclaimed in querulous tones. "Vot's eatin' you? Ain't gun-runnin' your little game?"

"No! You —— lousy pig of a Jew, it isn't. And let me tell you something further. If you go in with me on this deal I have in mind and try to do any gun-running, I'll rip your fat guts out. Get that!"

Golding cringed back in his chair. His big bulk seemed to shrivel up and he clasped his hands about his stomach as if to protect it from a threatened attack.

Fraser laughed shortly.

"You won't forget that, will you, Golding?" he asked curtly.

But the fire had gone out of his eyes, out of his voice, and Golding relaxed; only his heavy breathing indicated the strain of fear the Jew had been under.

"No, I von't forget," he said with a strained laugh. "But there's no calling for you to go using hard words. You're a funny fellow, anyway. When I talk about dope you don't get mad, very, but when I talk guns—Phoy! Vhy is that? Dope is much worser nor guns. Anybody'll tell you that."

"I'll tell you why, Golding. Dope selling is pretty low but, at least, it makes the natives less fit to fight whites. But guns! Now do you get it?"

"Sure! But the guns I'd sell needn't have to be guns vot shoot straight. They—" He stopped short as Fraser's face began to grow white again. "All right," he said hastily. "Let's get to business. If it ain't storekeeping, or blackbirding, or dope, or guns—vot the —— is your game?"

"Diamonds!"

GOLDING looked at him incredulously; a mixture of amused reproof and fear on his face. He glanced furtively toward the door and then began to laugh softly.

"Mister," he gasped, "you'll be the death of me. If you're an I. D. B.—an' I never had one spin me a long yarn like vot you've done before—I've already told you I ain't having none. An' if you're a detective a-tryin' to frame me, vhy you're just wasting your breath an' my time. My business is all legal and above-board."

"Yes," Fraser commented sarcastically. "You've got that reputation. Now listen here, Golding, and don't be a —— fool. As soon as the government received Macombe's request they ordered a secret survey to be made of the country; they wanted to find out if the country was worth taking over apart from its political importance. And it is, Golding. The party of surveyors found coal, tin, gold, copper and—" he lowered his voice to a whisper—"I happen to know that one of the men discovered—"

He stopped and jerked his head back in the direction of Bessie.

"Is she safe?" he asked.

"Safe as houses," Golding replied. "Safe bind, safe find's my motto dealing with women. An' anyhow, she's asleep. Go on, mister. Vot did this surveyor discover?"

"Blue clay!"

Golding sat up and rubbed the palms of his hands on his fat knees. Then he relaxed again.

"Vell? Vot of it?"

"——, man! Don't you know what they find in blue clay?"

"Sure I do. But again I asks, 'Vot of it?' The reports have gone in to the government an' you can bet your life they're not going to let anybody develop the working. The syndicate down here vouldn't stand for it. The syndicate's got a lot of pull about things like that."

"But I happen to know," Fraser said softly, "that this particular surveyor didn't include the locating of diamondiferous soil in his report. What do you say to that?"

Golding's fingers opened and closed spasmodically.

"If that's true an' you know where the place is, we can clean up big money."

"I know it's true—and I know where the place is. You see, I made the survey."

Golding nodded. Then asked craftily—

"You've got proof?"

"Proof that I was a government surveyor—yes. The rest you'll have to take on trust."

"That's true. I'd except no proof, anyvay, short of seeing the place vith my own eyes. An' yet, if this is all true—vhy didn't you stay an' work the claim by yourself, eh?"

"Don't be a fool! I was one of a party on government service. I had to go very careful for fear one of the others would stumble on to my secret. But they didn't, and as soon as the job was over I left the service.

"I couldn't go back there right away—and alone. They'd have suspected something, sure, if I had. They thought it was funny that I should be leaving the service as it was. But I told them a yarn about urgent family affairs and a civilian job offered me at home, and they swallowed it. You see, if I'd gone back at once they'd have put some one on my trail. Besides, for another thing, I didn't have no money and I don't know enough about the natives. So I came down here to look for the right sort of partner—one with money, not too honest and who understands natives."

"And I'm the first one you've told about this?"

"Of course. It isn't a thing one'd go yelling at the street corners."

"An' vot do you expect me to do—supposin' I believe it all?"

"Advance me enough money to outfit and live on for a few months and find me a partner who can handle the natives."

"An' vot 'ud be my share, eh?"

"We divide all takings equally. That's more than generous."

Golding smiled, whistled softly under his breath and, rising, crossed over to his desk and from one of the drawers took out a large map.

"Here, Fraser," he said. "Show me whereabouts that location is near to."

Fraser hesitated a moment then crossed over to the desk and pointed to a place on the map marked "Misongwe."

"It's near there—the chief's kraal. And that's as much as I'm going to tell you."

"Come, come," Golding expostulated. "You must have more faith in me than that. It ain't likely now, is it, that I should put my money into a thing just on your say so—without proof or anything?"

"You'll advance me money and find me a partner just on my say so, or I go to Grunty Jones."

There was a note of finality in Fraser's voice.

"No!" Golding said suavely. "I don't think you will, mister. You'll tell me all I vant to know. 'Cause vhy? 'Cause if you don't I'll report all vot you've told me to the authorities. They may not believe it all but, believe me, they'll keep an eagle eye on anybody trekking north."

"You crafty, slimy ——!" Fraser exclaimed angrily. "I've a good mind to—"

Golding held up his hand.

"Vot's the good of gabbing like that? We've got to be friends. Look here. I'll be your partner; I'll go up country with you—I've been aching to get outside for a long time. I vant to see if I can still do business with the niggers the vay I used to in the old days. I'm sick of the *dorps* an' they're sick of me; things are getting too hot; the police are getting too nosey. Sure! An' it'll do Bessie good, too. She's makin' eyes at too many strangers for my liking. An', anyvay, I ain't got a man I can trust in a deal like this; I ain't got nobody I can trust. For that matter, how do I know I can trust you if I ain't on hand to watch? So you be good an' if vot you say's true, I'll give you a ten per cent. commission on all takings. Now that *is* generous, ain't it?"

"As generous as ——," Fraser said bitterly. "But you've got me. I can't go to any one else now. I've blabbed too much to you—like a fool. Only listen to this, Golding. If you try to double cross me on the commission or anything—well, you won't live to come back to this."

"That's all right, my boy. Now we understand each other, eh? You've got nothing to grumble about, anyway. If your tale's straight you'll find ten per cent. is a king's ransom—especially as you ain't got a woman like Bessie to waste money on." He laughed. "Vell, we'll start tomorrow—no, the day after. Tomorrow I'll outfit."

"You can't start as soon as that," Fraser expostulated. "Listen! It's not going to be as easy as all that. We've got to plan a little; besides, you are in no condition for the life we'll have to lead."

"I vas a trader once. I can be a trader again. 'Tain't as if I had to do pick an' shovel vork or if I was starting vithout capital, as I did the first time. An' Bessie'll be along to cook my grub. Maybe she don't know how—but she vill before she comes back. She von't be so free making eyes at other men then. We'll be out of the District inside three months if the takings are any good, heading for Portuguese territory—there ain't no I. B. D. laws there—and in four months' time, five at the outside, we'll be in Amsterdam, marketing the stones. So that's that. No need to vaste time making plans now. We can do that on the vay up. Come to think of it, we will start tomorrow. We can outfit at Bulawayo. They don't know me much there an' von't ask as many fool questions."

Fraser shook his head doubtfully.

"I think you ought to get some one else to go with me, Golding. There may be trouble with the natives."

Golding looked up sharply.

"I thought you said not?"

"Not in the ordinary way—no. But this blue clay is located on some kind of tabu ground. They got pretty mad when they saw me snooping around there. And then, too, there are two white men in the district who think they're appointed by the Almighty to look after the natives' welfare."

"They ain't government officials?"

"No. One's a Jew trader and the other's a missionary."

Golding laughed scornfully.

"Is that all that's worrying you? Nigger's superstitions don't mean a thing in my life. I know how to handle that. And as for the Jew and the missionary—show 'em both the color of gold, if they get too nosey, and they'll crawl up to you an' kiss your foot! Vot else?"

At this point Bessie yawned loudly and rose, stretching herself lazily.

"Lord!" she exclaimed. "I've been asleep. Ain't you two finished gassing yet? Me, I'm going up to the house, Alfie. Don't be late, old dear."

He looked at his watch and nodded, well satisfied that by this time the bar was closed and that place, and its temptations in the form of big prospectors, would not lead Bessie's feet from the straight and narrow path. He took the key from his pocket and tossed it to her.

She unlocked the door and passed into the street.

"Vell, vot next?" Golding repeated as he returned to his seat after looking the door behind Bessie.

III

PAUL MILES, missionary, rode dispiritedly away from Misongwe, the kraal of the chief, toward the setting sun, and saw nothing of its glories. He stared fixedly before him, yet saw nothing but mental visions, pessimistic visions; the beauties of the bush, the soft greens, the flaming reds, the herd of impala buck which leaped across his trail, swirling and turning in the air like leaves caught up in a sudden wind flurry, failed to rouse him from his deep reverie.

His head was bent, his hands rested lightly on the pommel of his saddle, the reins hung loosely on his horse's neck and the rawboned beast, conscious of the lack of a guiding hand, chose his own pace, stopping often to nibble the tender green shoots of the new bush growth.

A number of naked, fat-bellied little herd boys, driving home the goats, stood on one side to let the missionary pass. They saluted him with affectionate respect and called to him to admire their muscles. They looked despondent and talked together in wondering whispers when he only nodded curtly and passed on. At all other times it had been the custom of the *unfundisi* to stop and gossip with them. Sometimes he asked them questions about the great God and the woman Mary, His mother; presents of sweets always followed, so one could endure the questions.

But what ailed him today? What matter? White men are all very strange—and specially *unfundisi*. Laughter comes hard to white men. That is because they have white skins. And even if the missionary did wear black clothes—that was sure proof, look you, that he hated his color—his skin was still white.

And the sun was setting swiftly . . . The kraal was still far . . . The goats were a long way ahead . . . There will be beatings if one is lost. . . .

The low throbbing of drums sounded far to Miles' right, echoing across the valley. It was a sinister sound; the sharply defined rhythm carried a note of defiant, savage heathenism.

Somewhere in the depths of the bush an elephant trumpeted, and the horse snorted alarm; a tree hyrax screamed hideously, once and then was silent; some monkeys, the young ones clinging to their mothers' backs, crossed the trail a hundred yards, or more, ahead. An evil beast, all spotted sunlight and shadow, belly down in the dust, green eyes glowing, slunk close behind.

There was a sudden commotion in the bush, a swaying of boughs, a cry of pain—horribly human-like—followed by the purring growls of a leopard at his kill. Then silence, again except for the throbbing of drums, and, far away, a chattering of monkeys as they bemoaned the loss of an "old man" and hurled impudent threats at the destroyer.

There was silence, except for that and a bell-bird which "tonked" dismally, continuously. It occurred to Miles' fanciful mind that the bird was tolling the knell of all the bush victims since time first was.

When the horse came to the place where the leopard had crossed the path, it propped suddenly and when forced on by spur and impatient voice moved with a stiff-legged, mincing gait, its nostrils dilated with terror, its coat becoming suddenly black with sweat.

But, once the hated trail was crossed, the evil scent left behind, it stopped to nibble the green shoots once again.

Now only the jingle of the bit and the champing of his mount's teeth broke the silence. Miles felt horribly alone—and afraid.

Just before the sun dropped below the horizon, a strong breeze sprang up, blowing from the east.

It was tainted by the strong odors of the distant kraal at Misongwe—animal smells and green wood smoke mingling made a pungent combination which was not wholly unpleasant. It made Miles feel less alone, less despondent, no longer afraid.

Snatches of song came to him on the wind. It awakened vague memories, and he knit his brow in thought, trying to capture the elusive picture. Presently it came to him and he chuckled slightly. There was a little girl who played the harmonium at the Sunday school back home. Her legs were too short to reach the pedals and, not being able to keep the bellows properly filled with air, the tune came in sudden, spasmodic gusts!

The force of the wind increased; the snatches of song took ordered form and Miles found himself singing the tune very softly, as if afraid to disturb the distant singers.

His stern face softened; his pale gray eyes no longer glowed somberly; the red thatch of his head—he wore no hat—seemed less belligerent.

After all, he had cause for congratulation instead of grief. Had he not just preached to the biggest gathering of natives that had yet listened to his teachings? Was not the new chief, the young man M'Boza, his first convert, a man of his own choice and, consequently, would not his path from now on be an easy one? Almost too easy!

He had been foolish to fancy things; foolish to imagine that the natives' profession of Christianity was only a lip profession; he had been foolish to imagine that the attitude of his listeners today—even that of the chief—had personified insincerity.

Here was proof that he had misjudged them—this hymn they were singing. It rose triumphantly now, even when the breeze slackened, drowning the note of the drums; it was symbolical of the triumph of good over evil.

"Onward, Christian soldiers—"

His song stopped with a strangled gurgle as something flew into his face with a sharp impact and dropped down on to the back of his hand. He looked at it and smiled. The insect's attitude amused him for a little while until, presently, it brought to mind his past doubts and fears of the natives at Misongwe. The creature—it was a praying mantis—had been sent to him as a sign, he told himself, as a warning of the insincerity of Chief M'Boza and his people.

"It's all a pose," he muttered angrily.

He squashed the insect with a sharp blow and, wiping off its filthy smear on his trousers' leg, wheeled his horse and galloped swiftly back along the trail; he was determined to spy upon his people and prove—or disprove—his doubts.

Once his horse swerved sharply from the trail, then halted and stood still, trembling violently. Only Miles' superb horsemanship enabled him to keep his seat at the swerve. He patted his mount's neck, now, talked to it soothingly, reviled it in quiet tones for being frightened at a danger that had passed—at the scent of a leopard.

Then he reviled himself for allowing doubts and vague fears to trouble him. He was about to turn his horse again, ashamed of his suspicions, when another drum took up the note of the first. It came from Misongwe and its beat, its rhythm clashed with the tune they were singing.

His face clouded with anger as he rode on again; his fingers opened and closed convulsively on the reins.

He caught up with the herd boys. They made way for him silently gazing at him with lack-lustre eyes. He had surprized them once, he had rebuffed them, had—most likely—destroyed their faith in him. Now they were on the defensive; all advances would have to come from him. So, when he asked them sharply, "What is the message of the drums, *umfans?*" they stared blankly at him until he repeated the question.

Then the biggest of them answered in a flat, toneless voice:

"We don't know? What drums?"

He made the clicking noise of impatience and rode on.

Presently he came to a wide belt of green corn; it rustled mysteriously in the evening breeze, and violet shadows, lengthening momentarily, darted about it as if seeking to escape its confines and finding themselves continually balked.

He drew rein finally behind a stunted mimosa tree which stood at the other side of the corn patch.

He was only two hundred yards or so now from the kraal which nestled like a collection of gigantic mushrooms at the foot of a towering, two-peaked *kopje*. That *kopje* and the others adjoining it, looming up against the purple haze of sky, seemed to mark the earth's limits.

Outside the stout stockade which protected the kraal's vulnerable front, a large fire had been lighted and the people of Misongwe were milling about it, seething backward and forward, going round and round, like ants about a honey pot.

MILES looked through his field glasses.

The people were dancing as he had never thought to see them dance again—were they not Christians? Every gesture, every movement was bestial He saw the young chief, the man he had christened Adam, stagger away from the dancers, drink from a big gourd and then return to the dance with renewed vigor. Here and there—

But Miles had seen enough. His face was white with anger, but he checked the impulse to ride up to the kraal and denounce the dancers. He had learned a great deal since he had first come to the district three years ago.

"I've tried to do too much in too short a time," he mused as he rode slowly away, his anger giving place to sorrow and self-condemnation. "I've been misled by surface things—believing only what I wanted to believe. These people are like their rivers, as 'Big 'Un' says. They're hard to know. Looking at the surface doesn't help at all—and the water's so muddy it's hard to see below. I suppose Big 'Un 'll laugh when I tell him about this. But the only thing about it that is even remotely funny to me is that I should go to a man named Isaacs!—bless him!—for advice.

"He'll probably tell me a lot of things which'll be good for me to hear. Such as, that this affair has only hurt my vanity, which I wouldn't have any if I was a proper missionary—which I wouldn't."

He smiled faintly and rode on faster, faster. But still the beating of the drums and the chanting sounded mockingly in his ears. He saw no humor in the fact that the people of Misongwe should perform their most licentious dance to fragments of the hymn tune he had so painstakingly taught them.

Darkness came suddenly.

Miles did not slacken his pace. The trail was smooth, his mount surefooted and Miles—he had ridden that way so many times—knew there were no low branches hanging over the path to sweep an unwary rider from the saddle.

He had nothing to fear except, maybe, attack from some night beast of the bush—and his horse's speed was the best protection from that.

After a long time the moon rose, revealing the trail ahead and exposing the phantoms of the bush; it became suddenly cold; a thick, white mist rose from the valley; in the moon's hard light the trees looked stunted, dead, as if blackened by a devastating fire.

To the right a silvery gleam indicated a shallow pool among the rocks. He rode toward it, dismounted and let his horse drink its fill. While it did so his eyes constantly searched the surrounding bush, his hand never left the butt of his revolver.

If he had not known full well what the silvery surface of the pool hid he would have drunk too—he was very thirsty, but not thirsty enough to drink that water; neither was he practised enough in the lore of the veld to drink with his teeth tightly clenched, using them as a strainer and so prevent the larger impurities—living and dead—from going down his throat.

Mounting again, he rode on and when he came to a forking of the trail did not, much to his horse's disgust, take the path which led to the left—to his mission. He was bound for the store of Big 'Un Isaacs; he needed that man's sympathy and shrewd advice.

After a while the trail began to rise; he was ascending the hill on the top of which Big Un Isaacs had built his store. Half-way up he came in sight of a small kraal built on a large shelving of rock—a sort of plateau—which jutted out from the hill. The trail ran through the center of the village, but rather than disturb the natives—it was very late and already the cur dogs were beginning to snuffle uneasily as they caught the scent of his horse—he made a wide detour.

When he came on the trail again he was not far from the store, although it was hidden from view by the thick bush growth which bordered the winding road.

He heard voices—the night air was very still—the voices of white people: A man's oily, suave voice which yet had a cruel, mocking note in it; a woman's—strident, tearful, shrewish; another man's—hard, bitter. And not one of the voices belonged to the storekeeper.

He reined in his horse and considered his course.

"Apparently Big Un has guests—a hunting party, I suppose. The district'll be full of them when the Government really takes over. Perhaps I'd better not go up—looking like this."

Then he laughed softly. The conventions of another civilization did not belong here. Besides, he didn't want to turn back. He needed the society of his own kind to take his mind off the defeat at Misongwe. And as that debacle came to his mind, the voice of the woman sounded softer, less shrewish, and for the first time in the three years he had been in the district Miles realized how much he had missed the association of white women.

AS HE was about to ride on a white clad figure stepped out from behind a thick bush. It was Moses, the storekeeper's cook. His teeth flashed white as he grinned a welcome.

"You have been a long time coming, *umfundisi,*" he said.

He spoke English fluently but with a thick, guttural accent; he intoned the words and had difficulty with the "w's"; it sounded somewhat as if he lisped.

"I heard voices of strangers at the store and I was wondering whether I ought to go up," Miles said.

He looked shrewdly toward Moses, but the big native had stepped back into the shadows and Miles could not read his facial expression.

"Why do you say I have been a long time coming, Moses?" he asked sharply. "Your master did not expect me tonight, surely? I was here this morning."

"And you are here tonight, *umfundisi,*" Moses said placidly, "and I am here to wait for you, as the master ordered."

"And now I am here—what?"

In spite of his close, three-year-old friendship with the storekeeper, Miles still found himself bewildered at times by the man's uncanny knowledge of things; it smacked of witchcraft, and although the after explanations were always logical each fresh demonstration made the missionary uneasy.

"The master told me to give you this."

Moses handed a note up to Miles.

"Then your master is not up at the store, Moses?"

"No, *umfundisi.* He rode away just after sundown."

Miles nodded.

"And who are the strangers at the store?"

Miles moved his horse away a little, hoping to draw Moses out of the shade.

"Two vhite men and their vooman, *umfundisi,*" Moses answered. He did not move from the shelter of the bush. "That is all I know, except that the master treated them as if they vere great ones."

Miles pocketed the note and gathered up the reins.

"I will go and talk to them."

"No—vait!" Moses said earnestly. "First read the letter I gave you, *umfundisi.* That vas the order of the master."

Miles hesitated, then shrugging his shoulders in puzzled impatience, took the note from his pocket and read, not without difficulty, for fleecy clouds were passing over the moon and Isaacs' crabbed handwriting was not easy to decipher.

Dear Missioner:

Too bad about what happened at Misongwe after your religion talk—

How did he know that? Miles wondered.

—but maybe you didn't ride back to see and of course you didn't understand the drum-talk.

So that was how he knew! As usual the explanation was ridiculously simple.

But I'm thinking you did ride back. You ain't altogether a fool and you must have suspected something. The only thing that's worrying me is whether you was fool enough to try and interfere. You would have done a couple of years back. If you did you won't read this. You won't read anything no more unless they have books in your heaven. They don't in mine. But what I'm thinking you did is this: You rode quickly away and said to yourself that you'd go and talk it over with Big Un. Not?

I'm sorry I ain't here to say hello! I was called away on urgent business and you wouldn't expect me to miss a business deal, would you? Well, don't you worry, missioner. It ain't as bad as what you think it is. Course you're feeling bad. This business has hurt your vanity, that's all; and a missioner didn't ought to have no vanity.

Miles smiled at that.

And let me give you a bit of advice, missioner. Sometimes it's good to be blind, and deaf and dumb. but especially blind. You can't see any evil then.

And I want you to go up now and say hello to my friends. I ain't seen 'em before—except one, maybe looks familiar. They nice people. The lady! Oy, such diamonds she wears. Be nice to them, missioner, especially to the fat man. He's one of my people.

And, missioner, don't forget my advice. Sometimes it's good to be blind.

Stay all night, missioner, I'll be back in the morning, maybe before sun-up.—BIG UN ISAACS.

Miles pocketed the note, frowning thoughtfully.

"The *umfundisi* has read the master's words?" Moses asked. "Does he understand them?"

"Yes. I think so, Moses. He wants me to forget all about the *indaba* at Misongwe, to act as if I knew nothing about it. That's it, isn't it?"

"The *umfundisi* had better ride on up to the store now," Moses said, then added cryptically: "As he rides he'd better say to himself over and over again, 'I am blind, and deaf, and dumb.' "

"And why should I say that, Moses?" the missionary asked.

"Because, *umfundisi*," Moses answered slowly, "because sometimes a man becomes vot he says he is."

"That's helpful," Miles muttered wrathfully. And aloud—"Are you not coming up to the store with me?"

"No. I have other vork to do. If any one asked the *umfundisi* if he had seen me tonight—he vould say no?"

"The shadows where you stand are very black shadows," Miles answered with a smile. "Is that wife of yours seeking you?"

Moses' domestic affairs were notoriously unpeaceful. The big native was mercilessly henpecked by his undersized little shrew of a wife.

There was a rustle in the undergrowth.

"Moses!" Miles called softly.

There was no answer. The rustling sounded farther away and was presently drowned by the vague night noises of the bush.

Miles rose on, uncomfortably conscious of the fact that he needed a shave, that his collar was dirty, his black clothes covered by the red dust of the veld. His hair, usually precisely parted and brushed back, was disheveled. He knew that he must look like a tramp.

And then a man's voice, raised in angry curse; the frightened cry of a woman; the sickening *woo-osh* of a whip meeting soft, resisting flesh, followed by a native's animal-like moan of pain, aroused him from his despondency.

He spurred forward and, coming almost immediately on to the large clearing which surrounded the store buildings, jumped off his horse—it trotted round to the stable at the rear—almost on top of a big, gross man who was threatening a bare-backed native who groveled on the ground at his feet.

Miles caught the thick wrist with an iron grip. The native rose and ran hastily away.

"—— you!" he said through clenched teeth; his face was very white, his eyes glared fiercely. "We don't allow that, here. Drop that sjambok—quick. Drop it!"

The stranger glared angrily; his lips moved, he grunted inarticulately and he struggled to release his wrist from the missionary's hold. But Miles increased the pressure of his grip, forcing the fat man to open his hand and let the sjambok fall from his nerveless fingers.

The fat man's left hand stole stealthily back to his hip and his fingers closed on the butt of his revolver. Slowly he drew it out of the holster. It was almost free when a woman rushed down the steps of the *stoep* which surrounded the store, shrieking, "No, no, Alfie, dear. That'd be murder!" She clutched despairing at his left hand.

The suddenness of it swung the fat man halfway around, caused him to lose his balance. He teetered backward. Only the missionary's grip on his wrist kept him from falling.

Miles loosed his hold on the fat man's wrist—pushed it away from him.

The fat man clawed frantically at the air, grabbed at the woman—it seemed to Miles that she purposely moved away from him—and then fell backward with a jolt that knocked all the breath from his body.

The woman kicked the revolver over toward Miles, looked at him meaningly, her lips moving in a silent message; then she knelt down beside the groaning man.

"Where are you hurt, Alfie darling?" she cooed. "Tell momma all about it, ducky."

Miles tried not to hear the man's blasphemous retort.

He picked up the revolver which had fallen from the man's hand.

"I beg your pardon, madam," he said.

But she seemed not to hear him; she was giving all her attention to the fallen one.

He touched her lightly on the shoulder. She looked up at him then and he wondered how a woman with such comely features could care so little for her personal appearance; her hair was untidy; apparently she had daubed paint and powder over a dirty face; her shapeless dress was grease-spattered. She looked like a slovenly charwoman.

"Go away," she said heatedly, "you've done enough damage."

Then her lips moved again in some voiceless message.

"Oh, let them alone," a voice called from the *stoep*. "He'll be all right; he's well padded. Come on up here and have a drink."

The woman nodded.

"Yes; go on up, mister. We'll be with you presently, won't we, Alfie? And you'll beg the gentleman's pardon for the way you've acted, won't you?"

The fat man answered with an unintelligible grunt and Miles, bowing stiffly, turned away, climbed the *stoep* steps and joined the other man.

"My name's Fraser," the other said. "Your's, I take it, is Miles? Isaacs told us about you. Said you were a regular hard case. Sit down and have a drink."

He poured out two glasses of whisky and handed one to Miles.

The missionary took it mechanically. He did not drink at all—never had—yet, somehow it never occured to him to refuse. He was wondering whether he had read the woman's silent message aright. She seemed to say—

"I wish you'd killed him."

"Here's how!"

They clinked glasses and the man Fraser drank thirstily. Miles appeared to be drinking too, but his glass was still full when he placed it down beside the chair on which he had seated himself.

"Have another?"

"Don't mind if I do," said Miles, and he passed up an empty glass.

He found himself trying to analyze his feeling and the explanation of his conduct. He succeeded only in feeling relieved that Isaacs had not yet replaced the rotten board in the floor of the *stoep* and he admired his own cunning in emptying his whisky through the hole which gaped at his chair's side.

Again they clinked glasses.

"Golding was funny, wasn't he," said Fraser. "That's Golding down there. We've had a hard trek today and he's got a touch of fever. It's made him splenetic. Usually Alfie's as meek as a sucking babe with natives; never raises his voice to them, much less his hand. But tonight, when that native of his dropped a bottle of whisky on his foot, why, Golding lost all control of himself. But you saw how he was. He'll be all right in a minute. Bessie—that's his wife—knows how to handle him. Ssh! Here he comes. Better act as if nothing out of the way has happened."

Miles nodded thoughtfully. Was this further advice to be "blind?"

The man and the woman had halted at the foot of the steps.

"You go and get skoff ready now, Bessie," Golding's voice said roughly. "And if it's burnt—"

He finished the sentence with an ugly threat.

"All right, Alfie," the woman answered meekly enough, and scurried away to one of the near-by huts.

Miles thought he heard Fraser cursing under his breath. Golding was coming slowly up the steps. He paused on the top one and lighted a cigaret before crossing over to a chair on the other side of Fraser from Miles.

Fraser murmured introductions; the two men nodded curtly.

Fraser filled up the glasses again; he and Miles clinked theirs but Golding was in too much of a hurry for that little formality. He drank noisily and then put his glass down on to the table.

NO ONE spoke for a little while. Occasionally the faces of Golding and Fraser were lighted up by the red glow of their cigars—it was only a fragmentary gleam—elsewise they were shaded from the moon's rays, as Miles' face was shaded, by the roof of the *stoep*.

"You hadn't ought to have interfered between a vhite man and a nigger," Golding said with startling suddenness. "That ——, now, you stopped me from sjamboking—"

"I'm sorry," Miles said. "I acted on an impulse. I do sometimes. I didn't know the circumstances, and I jumped to the conclusion—"

Golding wagged a fat forefinger at him.

"It ain't right to jump at conclusions—not vhen I'm the conclusion," he said with a chuckle. "That there nigger, now, he's a bad vun. He's a liar, a thief and—" he lowered his voice—"he looked eyes at my vooman. That's vot a mission trainin' did for him. Now vot do you say?"

"Only that I'm sorry I interfered," Miles said lamely, glad that they couldn't see his face; he was not even smoking and he sat further back in the shade.

He wondered why he should have been given two lying explanations of the sjamboking. He knew that the native was one of Isaacs' boys.

"Yah!" Golding continued. "That nigger I vas sjamboking—he should be sjamboked to death. I vill do that next time I see him. You made me mad vhen you interfered, Mr. Preacher. You—"

"I said I was sorry."

"That's all right then; your apology's accepted. Let's have another drink, eh?"

Fraser drew the cork from another bottle and refilled the glasses. The hole in the floor by Miles' chair drank to Golding's ribald toast.

"You and Isaacs must be doing fine up here," he said after smacking his lips. "A Jew and a missionary vorking together like vot I suppose you do, having a closed district to yourselves! Oy! You ought to have lined your pockets, the pickin's are so easy. I bet ever' nigger in the district is in debt to you—an' you can afford to carry a few poor payers, at that."

Miles laughed harshly.

"We haven't done so badly, we've made progress," he said slowly. "But there are drawbacks. The old superstitions are hard to break down."

Fraser and Golding exchanged meaning glances.

Miles rose.

"Vhere are you goin', mister?"

"To see if they've taken proper care of my horse. Perhaps, as Isaacs is not here, his boys are loafing. I'll be back."

"Ve'll be in the skoff-hut then. You come there. Course you know vhere it is?"

Miles nodded.

The other two watched him stumble down the steps and vanish round the back of the store. A moment or two later they heard his voice raised in anger; apparently his horse had not been properly taken care of.

"Vot did I tell you, Fraser," Golding smiled smugly. "Jew trader and missionary! They're both easy to handle vhen you know how."

"Yes. You're —— smart, Golding," the other agreed wearily. "Isaacs seemed to be a bigger sweep than you—if that's possible. But about this missionary fellow! I don't know what to think. The man who knocked you down is more like the reports I've heard of the man than the man who sat up here drinking to your filthy toasts. Suppose, Golding, only suppose now, that the trader and the missionary were both pretending to be something they're not?"

"Don't be a fool, Fraser. Vhy should they pretend? They've got no cause to suspect us of anything. For the matter of that we ain't here for anything that ain't legal and above-board. Course we're keeping our game strictly to ourselves—don't vant them claiming a share in the takings. We're up here to trade, just as I told Isaacs. Of course he didn't like it, and the preacher von't like it—it's cutting into their profits. And of course they'll try to make it hard for us to trade vith the niggers. And that's vot we vant. We vant them to try to stop us from doing vot ve don't vant to do. That leaves us free to do vot we do vant to do. See? Just the same, if I vant to trade, I'll trade. They von't be able to stop me. The niggers'll sell their souls for the stuff I've got."

"I'd like to know just what you've brought along in the way of trade goods, Golding. You outfited all by yourself and you've kept me away from those big, heavy boxes ever since we left. Don't forget what I told you about dope and guns—especially guns."

Golding chuckled, but his eyes had not a vestige of mirth in them.

"There you go again—always acting suspicious like. Vhy don't you trust your partner? I trust you? As for them trade goods—I vas a trader vonce before. I know what niggers like."

He looked up sharply as Fraser rose slowly from his chair.

"Vell! Vhy don't you say something?"

"I was thinking about the place where the blue clay is. It's not going to be easy to work it, Golding, and I wish you hadn't brought Bessie along."

Golding scowled.

"It'll be as easy as kiss your hand," he said confidently. "Ve von't have any trouble, believe me; not after I've had a private little talk with the chief. Now let's go and see if Bessie cooked skoff yet."

He rose ponderously and turned to go down the steps. "Just a minute," Fraser said tersely. "There's another thing I've been wanting to talk to you about. Don't you go bullying Bessie any more. You've made a slave of her, you treat her worse than you treat your niggers, and I won't stand for it any longer."

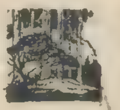
"Vot the ——!" Golding said wrathfully. "Oh, I see. She's been making sheep's eyes at you, eh? I've been vondering how long it'd be before she started on you. She's a ——, Fraser, an' you'd better turn the other vay when she looks at you. As for the rest, she's my vooman, Fraser, an' I do vot I vant with my property. See? Safe bind, safe find—that's my motto."

"You'll keep your paws off her," Fraser began threateningly.

"Sure! Anything for peace and quiet," Golding assented cheerfully. "Now let's go and see about skoff. I'm —— glad Isaacs left us to ourselves. He's a dirty ——, an' I couldn't have eat with him sitting at the table. Besides, ve'll be able to find out a lot ve vant to know from the preacher; he ain't so sly as vot Isaacs is. A Jew never tells all he knows, but this Miles—"

He linked his arms in Fraser's and, to outward appearance on the best of good terms, the two men descended the steps and walked over to the skoff-hut.

IV



ABOUT the same hour that Miles, the missionary, sat down to skoff with the Golding party, Isaacs, the storekeeper, came to a wide river. It was in the dry season, but the fine white sand of the river bed looked very much like swiftly flowing water in the moonlight. Halfway across the river was a large wagon; it tilted at a dangerous angle, for the near front wheel was off, the axle broken. Eighteen oxen, still tethered to the disselboom, were placidly chewing the cud and gazing dully at the series of fires which encircled them.

Boxes, food stuffs, cooking utensils, tents, water barrels were strewn about the wagon in a disorderly confusion; apparently they had been unloaded to lighten the weight of the wagon and so facilitate the work of repair. But no one seemed to be working; it looked as if the wagon and its contents had been deserted; only, very occasionally, the mournful lowing of one of the oxen broke the silence.

Around one of the fires the little storekeeper—it was not his physique that earned for him the nickname "Big 'Un"—could see a number of recumbent forms. He watched them for a long time from the cover of the thick grasses which edge the bank of the river. Save that once one of the black forms rose, stretched lazily and kicked a fire into a brighter blaze, sending up a shower of sparks, they might have been so many dead bodies. And then Isaacs saw the fire-tender stoop over the recumbent forms; from the distance there was an amusing appearance of paternal tenderness about this.

Isaacs whistled softly.

Immediately a soft whistle—it might have been the echo of his—answered him and he rode his horse out from the covering reeds and made straight for the wagon.

As he neared, the man by the fire came to meet him. It was Eli, one of Isaacs' house boys but, clad only in a filthy blanket instead of the neat white uniform Isaacs provided for his servants, he looked like a *shenzi*, a wild man, a native totally ignorant of white men and white men's ways.

"So the drums did not lie, Eli?" Isaacs commented.

"They never lie, master, unless the man who beats them lies. And what man dare lie to you?"

"I have known men to lie to me," Isaacs answered drily. "But no matter. You have done all as I ordered?"

The native's grandiloquent gesture included the wagon, the goods which lay about, the fires and the recumbent forms about the fires.

"The master has eyes," he said. "Because of me the wheel divorced the wagon and the axle was broken."

"And they did not suspect you?"

The native chuckled.

"Nay, master. Why should they? What am I but a fool of a wild man who has never before seen a white man? To me they gave a handful of salt and asked many questions. But, *au-a!* They were greatly angered at their servants. The fat white man beat them with a sjambok and reviled them. He has our talk well, but not as well as you have it, master. When you speak none can say, 'There talks a white man.' And—*au-a*, master—the fat one cursed the man that was with him, and the woman. I think that the fat one is all evil, master. When his horse shied as he went to mount it, he beat it about the head with a sjambok—and the blood ran, master. But, as I was saying, when he saw that much time would elapse before the wagon could be mended, he gave orders to his servants that they were to guard the wagon well, letting no one come near it, and they were to work speedily. Then he rode on with the other white man, and the woman, to your place."

"Yet nothing has been done toward the mending of the wagon, Eli. There will be more beatings in the morning."

"True, master. But I shall not be there. When the whites left their servants commenced working as if the evil spirits drove them on. They feared the fat man, even though he was not with them. His arm is strong; the lash of his sjambok stings; it is stiff with dried blood; it is wet with blood that runs. And so they worked hard, master; two unloaded the wagon, two gathered wood, the other two cut grass for the oxen. It was these last who found two large gourds of beer and brought them back to the wagon. But it was I who led them to where the gourds were hidden!

"At first they said they would not drink until their task was done. Then one tasted it to see, he said, if it was proper beer for men to drink. And while he tasted the others watched him anxiously, finally telling him to put the gourd down so that they too might taste.

"After that they forgot the sjambok of Mafouta, the fat one, forgot the work to be done, forgot everything except that it is well to drink freely when the drinking is free. After a little while—have I said that beer was very potent?—they slept. They are still sleeping. Truly the woman Quarre Quate brews a deep sleep."

Isaacs nodded.

"The powder she gave you. You put into the beer no more and no less than as she directed?"

"Who am I to change the direction of the wind? As it was ordered, so I performed. The woman said the *umfundisi* would be angry if he knew she had given me the stuff. But he will not know. He sees only what you permit him to see."

"Your tongue grows big, Eli. Take care you do not bite it. But what of tomorrow? When the sleeping ones wake, what then?"

"Then, master, their heads will be big, their throats dry and they will know shame and fear. So they will work like men possessed and, fearing a sjamboking, will say, doubtless, that lions surrounded them all night and they did not sleep. Thus they will explain their heavy eyes and tired look."

Isaacs dismounted and without further delay examined the goods of the travelers. Many of the packages he opened, doing them up again very carefully. One box—its lid was fastened down with large brass screws—occupied his attention for a long time, and as he worked over it his face was very stern.

At length, his inspection over, he mounted again, waved his hand to Eli and rode away.

The native watched him until the bush swallowed him up. Then he drained the dregs of beer which were left in the gourds—he was afraid he could not simulate the symptoms the others would show in the morning—and curled up beside the fire. In a few moments he was sleeping as soundly as he had feigned to sleep earlier in the evening.

IT WAS after midnight when Isaacs came to a kraal built amongst a group of small kopjes. He tethered his horse to a dead tree just inside the thorn *scherm* and entered a hut. It was larger and better built than the others of the kraal.

He coughed slightly at the pungent odor which filled the hut; swirls of smoke from the greenwood fire made his eyes water, and he took off his strong-lensed glasses and rubbed his eyes with his bony knuckles.

"We are all here, Big Heart," a woman's voice quavered. "I am here because it is my place. The others because your servant—Moses, you call him—said you wished to speak to them here."

The smoke fog cleared a little.

Opposite the entrance to the hut, close to the fire, sat an old woman. Her face was crisscrossed by the lines of age; she was naked save for a little beaded apron; her skin stretched tightly on her protruding bones. About her belly her skin was gray. It had been scorched by the fires of many years, for old age craves warmth and she was Quarre Quate, the woman who tended the fire of Kabula Kagorra, the Great God.

Sitting at her right was a big man—still powerful despite his abnormal fatness and the gray hairs of age. A skin *kaross* covered his bulk—except for that and a G-string he was naked.

Behind these two sat four men—very wise and very old. But none were as wise or as old as Quarre Quate, who was born before time was and to whom all the secrets of creation had been imparted.

At Quarre Quate's left a leopard skin was spread on the floor. Scattered on it were the divining bones of a witch-doctor.

Isaacs squatted down on his haunches and silently examined the bones, noting their position—each one in relation to the others.

"How do you read this, O woman of wisdom?" he asked humbly.

She sighed.

"Three times I have thrown them; three times they fell as you see. And their reading is evil, for see!

"The baboon falls on his back, away from the kraal of the chief, and the sheep are behind him; the young he-goat is on its back and other sheep are behind it; the old, castrated goat—it too is on its back, away from the kraal—"

And one by one she named the bones, explaining their position.

"What is their meaning, you ask. Listen! This is how I read it.

"Misongwe, the kraal of the chief, the place of the sacred fire, is doomed. See! The baboon leaves it, the young people follow. The new chief and his followers fly from a danger. Here is the danger, the leopards here. From white men the danger comes—is it you and the *umfundisi* the bones mean, Big Heart? The danger goes forward, leaving destruction behind. The old goat—even Macombe, the man who was chief—and his followers, they too are finished. *Au-a!* Wo to this people; desolation is upon us! The end is near! So speak the bones."

And Macombe and the men who sat behind exclaimed sorrowfully.

"*Tchat!* That we should live to see it!"

There was silence for a little while, broken only by the sobbing breath of the woman and the intense breathing of men who were concentrating on things supernatural and inwardly picturing the death of a people.

Macombe cleared his throat and moved uneasily. His fingers closed about the haft of his assegai. He picked it up and tested the sharpness of the blade on the ball of his thumb. He glowered fiercely at Isaacs.

"Storekeeper," he said slowly, "Man whom my people call Big Heart—and it was not in jest they named you—Quarre Quate has read you the meaning of the bones. Doubtless you knew their meaning before she spoke, for you are very wise in some things. But your wisdom did not show you the folly of coming here, alone, unarmed. You have been our friend for many years. Until the *umfundisi* came you saw eye to eye with us in all things. But he has bewitched you; you have become soft; your eyes are failing, your ears are stopped. And so, it is better that you die before you work this great evil, you and the *umfundisi*."

The four men at the back rose and got between Isaacs and the hut's opening. The woman covered her face with her hands and rocked back and forth—moaning.

"The bones do not show that you have gone mad, Macombe," Isaacs said contemptuously.

It was strange how such a little man, such a ludicrously clothed little man, could so dominate the others. His personality was so powerful that even the chief, in comparison, was nothing but a fat, blustering nonentity.

"Perhaps the bones lie," Isaacs continued. "But they do not show that the *umfundisi* and I die. So they must lie if, so be, you are determined to kill us. *Au-a!* You are like children. A momba bites you, death is at hand, so you go out and kill an earthworm and say that you will live."

A sudden gust of wind swept the hut; smoke clouds from the fire again obscured the vision. It cleared swiftly but, during that brief period of blindness, Isaacs' hands had moved deftly among the bones.

"And when we are dead, Macombe," he said now, looking into the old chief's eyes, "what then? Are we the only white men?"

"What matter about the rest? If the end of us is near, at least you who have brought it upon us will not live to see it; you will have gone ahead to make our paths smooth."

"But if the *umfundisi* dies, if I die, how can the prophecy of the bones be carried out. Will you make liars of them?"

Macombe's fingers slowly opened and the assegai dropped from his hand.

"Go," he said dully. "They do not lie."

Isaacs rose slowly to his feet and stood there looking down at the bones. Presently he began to chuckle, rocking back and forth on his heels.

Macombe looked up at him wrathfully.

"What!" he roared. "You make a mock of us! Do you desire death so much?"

He fumbled for his assegai.

"No, no!" Isaacs cried. "But look! You are all blind, the smoke is thick, the eyes fill with the water of lies and hide the truth. Look at the bones, O woman of wisdom. Is the old goat on his back? Has not the baboon his face *toward* the kraal?"

She bent over them, scrutinizing them carefully.

"Wo-we!" she exclaimed in confusion, passing her hand wearily over her eyes. "I am, perhaps, getting old. The smoke, the darkness—"

"Have done with excuses," Macombe interrupted impatiently. "What is the story of the bones?"

"It is as Big Heart says," she answered meekly. "The days of M'boza and his followers are near their end—that is still true. But the people live, the kraal stands, the fire will not go out."

Her voice ended on a high triumphant note.

"And the storekeeper and the *umfundisi?*" Macombe asked sharply. "What of them?"

"They are here with you. See!" She pointed to two bones close to that of Macombe. "There is other danger from other white men, but that is nothing; it passes away."

"And that is true? You do not lie?"

"Before, the smoke was thick in my eyes, Macombe. Now I see clearly. The bones do not lie."

"And I shall again take the place which, in my folly, I left?"

"Truly! The bones do not lie, Great One."

"No. The bones do not lie," Macombe said slowly, looking at the little storekeeper. "But this threatened danger—how will it pass? What is it?"

"I know not what it is," the woman answered. "It will pass if Big Heart helps us."

"Forgive me," Macombe said to Isaacs. "The bones spoke—at least the woman did not read them aright—and in my sorrow I spoke hastily. I—"

He waved his hands in a gesture of apology.

Isaacs squatted on his haunches again; the old men returned to their seats behind the woman and Macombe.

"It was about the threatened danger I came to see you," Isaacs said slowly. "But first, before we talk of it, before I promise to help, you must promise me two things."

"Does wind fail you," Macombe asked with a chuckle when the little man hesitated. "What are the two things you desire?"

"First," said Isaacs, "you must once again become chief, Macombe."

"That will be easy," Macombe assented with a grin. "One thrust with an assegai and the royal blood of the young ape who now sits in my place will no longer be."

Isaacs made a gesture of dissent.

"There must be no letting of blood, Macombe."

"Then how—"

"If it were proved that he was a dealer in witchcraft how long would the people suffer him to be chief, Macombe?"

"But a little while."

"And is it so hard, then, to prove witchcraft? Does not Quarra Quate brew a charm that makes all wizards speak?"

The idea seemed to amuse them all and for a little while they rocked with laughter.

"You are very crafty, Big Heart,"

Macombe said at length. "I am glad you are my friend. What *then is the second thing I must promise?"*

"The house of the *umfundisi*, the house in which he worships his God, is not yet finished. You must order that all the men shall labor upon it."

Macombe waved his hand.

"It is done," he said magnificently.

"And," continued Isaacs, "you must also order that your people shall go at least once a week to hear the *umfundisi* talk about his God."

"You are greedy, Big Heart," Macombe grumbled. "You said two things, but you ask for three."

"This last is part of the second," Isaacs replied calmly. "An empty house is not a finished house. You know it."

"True. But if I send my people to hear of the *umfundisi's* God, what then will happen to the old gods? What of Quarra Quate and Kabula Kagorra?"

"If I call beer by some other name does it lose its flavor? What matter then what name you give to the gods? They are not deaf, they will hear if you speak with a straight tongue to them."

"True," Macombe murmured. "But the *umfundisi* will make women of my warriors. His God is a woman's God."

"The *umfundisi* is no woman," Isaacs said curtly. "If your warriors become women it is because *they are women. If I call water beer, it remains water."*

"True. Then that too shall be ordered. Now what, Big Heart?"

They conversed long and earnestly then, often appealing to the woman for advice and information regarding the tribe's history; they made plans for a people's welfare and the overthrowing of threatened danger.

Cattle were lowing uneasily, smelling the approach of day; a cock crowed and in the east the stars paled before a swiftly approaching sun when Isaacs left the hut, climbed into the saddle and galloped swiftly toward his store.

V

THE heat under the tented roof of Golding's trek wagon was suffocating; loathsome flying insects filled the air with a sickening odor and the hum of their rapidly beating wings spoke mockingly of sleep which would not come.

The woman, Bessie, *looked very wan and unkempt. Her hair—it* had been of a glorious Titian hue not so long ago—was a dirty mouse color streaked with rust-like stains; her forehead was puffed by sun blisters; her cheeks were hollow; her face was smudged by the dirt of cooking pots and the smoke of fires; her spirits had ebbed. She looked a bedraggled thing of the gutter, and in her eyes was the mean, vengeful spirit of the gutter which, seeing no hope anywhere, accepts the rebuffs and derision which fill the cup of the down-and-out and prays for the coming of a day of vengeance. The heat had hit her hardest of the three; it had dried her up, had scorched the very sap of life from her body. She sat now on the floor of the wagon, a spineless pitiful drab.

Golding had suffered too—still suffered. The years that had elapsed since he left the life of a trader had made him soft. A hundred times since the rising of the day's sun he had inwardly cursed his folly—as he now called it—in coming on this expedition. His body was too accustomed to the enervating luxury of soft divans and rare foods to flourish on a bed of grass and the spartan diet of the trail.

He sat on the wagon seat, his clothing saturated with sweat, and dripped. He looked like a large mess of dirty tallow melting in the sun. *He was clad in silk pajamas. They were spattered with grease*; unhealthy looking flesh showed through the rips. His feet were bare; the bald spot of his head was incrusted with the red dust of the veld. Around his left thigh was a blood-stained bandage.

He cursed it, the heat and the flies. He cursed Bessie and the man who had told him the story which had brought him up here. Golding was abjectly miserable, but he never once spoke or thought of turning back. Where money was concerned he had the grit and persistancy of a bull dog.

The heat seemed to trouble Fraser very little. He was the only one of the three to realize the danger of a white man forgetting the things a white man does not do. He had shaved recently—within the past few days certainly—and his clothes were clean and mended. His eyes had dark circles under them and they were bloodshot, his carriage was not quite so erect and he looked a little thinner—but otherwise the heat had not affected him.

His eyes were fixed on Bessie; apparently he was trying to convey some silent message to her. Of Golding's presence he seemed to be quite oblivious, until that man struck viciously at a tetse fly which had alighted on the blood-stained bandage, missed and grunted as if with pain.

Fraser smiled then and, thinking he was safe from observation, winked at Bessie.

But Golding's piggy eyes were not blinded and pressing his big hairy hands on the bandage as if he sought to throttle the pain it concealed, he roared in angry indignation.

"Vot! You vould laugh at me, eh? You vould vink at my vooman so that she too vould laugh."

Fraser turned to him, a killing light in his close-set black eyes.

"You're wrong, Golding. You're always wrong," he said curtly. "You think you're clever, but you always see things that don't exist."

"I see vot I see," Golding grunted. "And I know things. I'm no fool, I tell you."

Fraser sighed.

"At least you'll admit that you made a mistake bringing Bessie up here. Look at her—"

"I don't vant to look at her; she looks like a dirty dish rag."

"That's your fault. You shouldn't have brought her along. I told you not to. She—"

"At least she knows how to cook an' polish boots now. She didn't before," Golding chuckled.

Fraser looked at him contemptuously.

"Well, never mind about that. But look at yourself. You're all belly and grease. You're not fit for trekking. And where's that knowledge of natives you boasted you had? What's it got us? Nothing—except that assegai wound in your thigh. And if the spear was poisoned—as is very likely—all you'll get out of the trip'll be a nice grave."

"Don't you vorry," Golding said confidently. "It vasn't poisoned. I'd be dead by now if it vas. An' you'd have something to laugh about."

"It's a fact I shouldn't cry," Fraser admitted drily.

Golding looked at him thoughtfully. Then.

"It's the bloody heat, Fraser, an' the stinkin' flies, an' the nothin' to do vot makes us talk like this. Ve ain't got nothing to grumble at. Everything's goin' nicely. Look vot we've done already. We've only been here vun week an' we got this young cock of a chief peckin' out of our hands. An' my! Can't he lap booze! He does vot we tell him now an' pretty soon he'll make that old vooman do wot we vant. Say, listen! How many times has the missionary and that dirty little —— Isaacs tried to come to Misongwe since we've been here, eh? An' how many times have they been turned back by warriors before they got anywhere near the place? Every time, Fraser. An' that's because I ordered it. That's proof enough, ain't it, that ve stand high with the chief? We give the vord an' he turns back the men who've been big bugs in the country for years. He von't see them an' so, they don't know vot we're doing or vhy. Vot more do you vant? The place is ourn."

"And yet," Fraser objected, "we haven't put spade to ground, and we are as far from getting at diamonds as we were at Kimberley. All we've got to show is that assegai wound. Lucky for you he didn't hit where he aimed."

"He did, Fraser. If he'd have wanted to kill me he'd have done so—him or the others with him. Oy! They came about me like bees round honey. They vouldn't listen to me an' they vouldn't let me stay. They hurried me avay back to the wagon here an' vhen I turned to argue, like, vun pricked me with his ticker. There's a big tabu on that place, that's a dead cert."

"Yes. And that's where the blue clay is—round by the Hut of the Flame. But you said you could fix the nigger's superstitions; they didn't bother you, you said. Well! You can't say I didn't warn you. What we'd better do now is go back before it's too late and find some one who does understand the niggers. Better start tomorrow unless—" he hesitated a moment—"unless we take Isaacs and the missionary in with us."

A curse expressed Golding's contemptuous disgust at the suggestion.

"Don't be a fool, Fraser," he went on. "I tell you I know niggers. We're all right as long as we don't hurry them. They're coming our way, but it takes time an' a lot of bad gin to destroy the old gods. The chief an' his advisors—thank Heaven he ain't got no old ones—are with us already; if they vasn't, I'd have been killed the other day. But he ain't ready just yet to do vot we vant him to do about the digging. Vait a bit, that's all."

He yawned and stretched lazily.

"Now look ahere, Fraser. I vant to sleep. I didn't close my eyes last night, not a vink did I get—this blasted leg hurt me so. An' vhile I'm sleepin', vhy don't you an' Bessie go for a ride an', perhaps, shoot a buck for supper. Go on. It'll do you good." He turned to the woman. "Vot do you say, Bessie, eh?"

She rose quickly, enthusiastic at the suggestion and Fraser did not give voice to the demurral he had been on the point of making. He forgot his suspicions of Golding in his eagerness to get away somewhere alone with Bessie.

It was a queer infatuation he had for the woman. Somehow his eyes were blinded to the thing she was. He saw her as a very beautiful, brilliant woman, with glorious red hair, wearing a wealth of diamonds of his purchasing.

As the two of them clambered down from the wagon and stood waiting for a native to saddle their horses, they whispered together uneasily.

Golding smiled sardonically and then, climbing clumsily in to the back of the wagon, groaning with pain as he did so, slumped down on a pile of dirty blankets, put a large, white handkerchief over his face to keep off the flies and assumed an appearance of sleep.

The horses ready, Fraser lifted Bessie into the saddle and then tiptoed to the back of the wagon and peered through a slit in the canvas.

Golding was apparently in a heavy sleep; he snored raspingly and the ragged edge of his handkerchief fluttered outward at every exhalation of his breath.

"He's asleep, all right," he said confidently as he and Bessie cantered away a moment later. "I thought for a moment that he might be shamming, planning to trap us. But he can't suspect anything. We're safe."

She nodded. Speech always came hard to her when she rode. The gait of the horse made her breathless and she grunted each time she hit the saddle.

They skirted the kopjies about Misongwe and drew up at length in a *vlei* carpeted with a thick, moss-like grass. There they dismounted and, lying in the shade of a large mimosa, talked awhile, making plans which would take them to freedom and the gay capitals of the world.

AS SOON as Fraser and Bessie had ridden away Golding rose, an ugly expression on his face.

"The ——!" he swore.

And then he smiled, well satisfied that they were out of his way for the afternoon. He owned to himself that he was afraid of Fraser, remembering only too well that man's threats and the expression on his face when he had made those threats.

He pulled on a pair of dirty khaki slacks over his pajamas, slipped his feet into some *veldschoon* and then, with much grunting, took out the brass screws which fastened down the lid of a large box. For a moment he toyed with the bolt which still secured the cover as if about to open it, decided not to and, going to the wagon front, called two of his native servants who were loafing near by.

They came slowly over to him and grinned with impudent familiarity.

"Do you want us to follow the man and your woman again?" one asked with a leer.

Golding did not reprove the man's insolence.

"No, Hans," he said with a laugh. "You've already found out enough for me about them. I will deal with them later. You're good boys, both of you. Come up here, I've got a drink for you."

They clambered quickly up beside him and eagerly waited while he poured two generous tots of gin.

"You won't talk of what you've seen, will you?" he asked as he handed them the drinks.

They emptied the glasses before replying.

"No. Our eyes are closed. We have seen nothing; our mouths are stopped up, we can say nothing."

Then they winked and Hans nudged Golding in the ribs with his elbow.

The three of them laughed uproariously and then the white man, sobering quickly, pulled on a loose-fitting jacket, into the pockets of which he stuffed bottles of gin. Pointing to the box, he said—

"Get that out."

Complaining that it was too heavy for them to handle alone they dropped it as they were getting it out of the wagon and listened sullenly while he cursed them for their clumsiness.

He made them pick it up and stand waiting there while he poured himself out a drink. Then, buckling on a revolver, he climbed down from the wagon and led the way to the kraal of the chief.

Strangely, the wound in his thigh did not seem to bother him now and he walked without the slightest suspicion of a limp.

Coming to the high, fence-like hedge which encircled the huts of the chief, he directed the natives to place the box just inside the opening and curtly dismissed them.

M'boza, the chief, an undersized native with a pock-marked face and the mean, vicious eyes of a hemp-smoker, was sitting on a broken down camp-chair at the door of his hut.

He nodded in answer to Golding's brazen grin, and a light of cupidity came into his eyes as he held out his hands in the supplicating gesture of a beggar.

"I am very thirsty, Mafouta, "he whined.

Golding nodded understandingly.

"Yah! But I can't give you any more *puza*. You're a Christian."

M'boza made a feeble attempt to assume an air of dignity.

"Truly," he said. "My name is Adam. I sit on a chair like a white man, I wear a white man's clothes."

He picked with nerveless fingers at the once white collar which sagged about his scrawny neck. On his feet were footless socks; his trousers—they had once belonged to Miles—were much too large for him; he wore his shirt outside his trousers. He presented a lamentable burlesque of a white man—a white man with a black skin and a black soul.

"I am very thirsty, Mafoute," M'boza said again.

"Then call some of your wise men and we will all drink together."

"Is there enough for all?" the chief asked anxiously, and clapped his hands when Golding nodded.

To the woman who came in answer to his summons, M'boza gave certain orders and presently six men—of the same stamp as himself—filed into the enclosure. They paid a casual homage to their chief and then looked with thirsty eyes at Golding.

"And now for the *puza*," M'boza said with a sigh of happy anticipation.

"First let us talk of things," Golding said slowly.

"*Wo-we!* That is all you think of—talk! How can we talk when our throats are dry?"

Golding pulled one of the bottles of gin from his pocket and holding it up to the sun squinted at it lovingly. Crossing over to the chief, he sat down beside him and held the bottle temptingly before his nose, snatching it quickly away and laughing when M'boza made an uncertain grab for it.

"You make a mock of me," M'boza said sullenly. "What do you wish to talk about?"

"I have spoken of it once before but—well! A dry throat makes a silent tongue."

He drew the cork from the bottle and poured its contents into a gourd of beer which stood by M'boza.

The chief drank, smacking his lips in appreciation, and then handed the gourd to one of the others who crowded quickly around him.

Swiftly the gourd passed from hand to hand. Soon it was empty.

"Now we can talk a little," M'boza said, looking longingly at the bulge in Golding's other pocket. "Although it would be better to drink a little more."

"Not yet," the white man said suavely. "First let us talk about the ground which is near to the Hut of the Flame."

M'boza moved uneasily.

"I have talked with Quarre Quate," he mumbled, "but all to no purpose. No earth may be turned there; it is sacred ground. Evil would befall the man who breaks the tabu. Aye, and evil would come upon the kraal."

"I do not ask you to break the ground, M'boza. Yet if I did, what have you to fear? You are wise, you are a great man, you are cleverer than any white man. You are above all tabus."

"That is true, Mafouta," M'boza murmured and then lapsed into a sullen silence.

Presently he burst into a gay song. The moods of a hemp smoker are decidedly erratic.

"I am still thirsty," he said, stopping his song abruptly. Golding looked at him shrewdly and then, well satisfied with what he saw, uncorked the other bottle and handed it to M'boza. He smiled when he saw that the bottle was half empty before the chief handed it to one of the others, and when all had drunk he said—

"Then you will grant me permission to dig and you will give me a bodyguard so that the warriors who obey the orders of the old women will not harm me?"

"A little drink or two is a small price to pay for something you so greatly desire, Mafouta. What is in that box?"

"Ah!" Golding exlaimed, and, clapping the chief on the shoulder, he looked around at the others. "See what a bargainer this M'boza is! And how wise! What is in that box, he asks. You shall see."

He went over to it and, kneeling beside it, pushed back the bolt and raised the lid.

"——!" he swore under his breath. "Somebody's been at this. The powder's gone! It's that —— of a Fraser." His anger gave way to a panic of fear. "Then he knows," he muttered, a sobbing catch in his voice. "Ach! Vot a fool I am! I must have packed it somewhere else—or left it behind. He vouldn't have taken that and left these behind. That didn't matter *very* much, he said."

A shadow fell across the box and he looked up with a start to see M'boza and the others looking down at him.

"Well," he said, pointing to the contents of the box, "what do you think of those?" "It is nothing we can drink," M'boza said grumblingly.

Golding's face fell. He had counted on the old, rejected military carbines to break down M'boza's last walls of superstitious fear; he had expected them to buy him permission to make a mock of a people's soul.

"With these," he said insinuatingly, "M'boza can take what he pleases. The storekeeper has much *puza*—I have none left—and if M'boza goes to him with one of these in his hands the storekeeper will give him all the *puza* he needs. Here, in this box, is all the power of a white man."

M'boza's face lighted up.

"That is true. I had not thought of that. Give them to me, Mafouta."

"But first you must promise to let all things be as I ask about the digging."

M'boza looked doubtfully at his counselors. The old beliefs die hard.

"With these," said one of the men with a short, dry laugh, "what care we for the traditions of the old ones? Did not the *umfundisi* once say that they were all foolish lies? Did he not once try to put out the flame which has never died? And still he lives, no harm came to him."

M'boza's last fears vanished.

"All shall be as you desire, Mafouta," he said. "Give us the guns."

Golding took them out, one by one. There were eight of them—two for M'boza, one for each of his counselors. There was ammunition too—three hundred pounds—to be distributed.

With a contented smirk on his face Golding closed the lid of the box and sitting down watched the natives play with their toys. It didn't matter to Golding that the rifles would probably explode with the firing of the first shot and kill the firer. But he didn't want that to happen while he was around—they might hold him responsible and the consequences would be disastrous to him. To avoid that possibility, he told them that a strong charm was on the guns and that they must not fire them until the moon was full. By that time he hoped to be a long way from Misongwe.

Presently another thought—it was fear-inspired—came to him. He held up his hand in an appeal for a hearing.

"I had forgotten," he said, when they had gathered about him, "that there is another tabu on the guns. The man Fraser must not know you have them. If he finds out, they will burst in your hands and kill you."

They moved uneasily.

"You had better take them back," M'boza said shrilly. "You give us dogs that bite their masters."

Golding cursed under his breath. He thought he was being very clever in fixing it so that Fraser would be blamed should any gun burst; and, at the same time, he thought he had provided against the danger of Fraser discovering that he had been trafficking in guns. But, instead of being clever, he had been very foolish, and he was now in danger of losing all that he had gained.

"You are fools," he said slowly, feeling his way with care. "The man Fraser will never know unless you, or your people, tell him. Also—" he took a deep breath—"if he died the tabu would be lifted."

He sighed with relief as M'boza looked significantly at one of his counselors. He had been clever, —— clever, he told himself.

"Then all is agreed?" he said. "You will keep to the bargain?"

"Truly!" answered M'boza.

Golding held out his hand.

"White men always shake hands when they make agreements," he said. "It is a strong tabu—the man who breaks it, dies."

His big flabby hand closed over M'boza's cold paw in a handshake which symbolized the treachery of a white man and the degradation of a black

Promising to come again in the evening, with more gin, Golding left the hut and sauntered back toward the wagon. It had been a very profitable afternoon.

As he neared the wagon he saw Hans seated in the shade of it, a bottle of gin in his hand, a big cigar in his mouth. He was declaiming loudly to a number of women from the kraal, boasting of his own bravery and cunning.

At first Golding was inclined to laugh and spend the time until the return of Fraser and Bessie, in exchanging rude jests with the women. Then he heard Hans say something which roused him to a sudden fury of passion—he was very susceptible to ridicule.

At his sudden bellow and rush forward the women fled, shrieking with laughter; Hans, a sickly grin on his face, rose uncertainly and was met by a wild, smashing blow on the jaw. He did not attempt to rise again but lay pawing the ground. Golding, still beside himself with rage, kicked the luckless native again and again until, dripping with sweat, totally exhausted by his insensate rage, the white man staggered away, climbed up into the wagon and threw himself down on a heap of blankets.

And so he did not hear the curses and threats which Hans muttered as he dragged himself slowly away to the camp-fire of the wagon boys, did not see the look of hate in the native's eyes.

GOLDING drowsed but was awakened—almost instantly it seemed to him—by Fraser's harsh voice shouting:

"Golding! Come out here! I want you!"

He rose and went to the front of the wagon.

"Vell! Vot do you vant," he grumbled. "First chance I get of sleepin', an' this leg of mine hurting like ——, an' you—"

He stopped short, frightened by the look in Fraser's eyes.

"Vell!" he asked sharply. "Vot do you vant?"

The woman Bessie cowered under a *mapani* bush, her eyes wide with fear; the natives—Hans bent over, his face contorted with pain—were lined up behind Fraser. None of the natives from the kraal were to be seen.

"Vot do you vant, Fraser?" Golding asked again.

Fraser picked up the long driving whip—it required two hands to wield it—and flicked it. The crack of it sounded like a rifle shot.

"Get down," he said tersely. "I want to talk to you. I've told you a lot of times you'd kick a nigger once too often."

A look of relief passed over Golding's face and he climbed down and walked with a swagger toward Fraser, then suddenly remembered his wound and limped painfully.

"So!" he sneered. "So Hans has been telling you things, eh?" He looked savagely at the native. "An' you're playing the goody-good, eh?"

"Yes. Hans has been telling me things," Fraser replied slowly. "He saw you give some guns to M'boza and— Take that, you ——!"

The whip cracked and the lash bit into the flesh of Golding's shoulders. He howled, turned to run, stumbled and fell on his face.

Again the whip cracked and Golding's body quivered at the bite of the lash.

"I warned you," Fraser's monotonous voice went on. "I've been a fool from the beginning—" *crack*—"I ought to have known you couldn't play a crooked game straight." *Crack.* At each lash Golding yelled like a licked cur. "It was a fool's scheme of mine from the first—" *crack*—"but I didn't see it until now. It's not too late. Pretty soon—" *crack*—"when I'm tired of thrashing you, you're going to get those guns back from M'boza. After that, you can go to ——. I'm done—"

Crack! Crack!

They were louder reports and had an evil sound.

The whip dropped from Fraser's fingers; he half turned toward Bessie, held out his hands toward her and laughed harshly when she shrank back, away from him.

"What a fool I've been," he gasped. "I was blind—I—"

He pitched forward on his face and was still.

Bessie ran toward him, hesitated a moment by his side, and then went over to Golding, who had risen to his feet and stood swaying stupidly, the still smoking revolver in his hand.

"Oh, Alfie," she moaned. "They'll call it murder! They'll hang you."

He shook off her clutching hand.

"Shut up, you!" he growled. "I vant to think."

He stumbled over to where Fraser was lying and, kneeling down, examined him carefully.

He rose presently.

"He's dead, Bessie," he said in flat tones.

He glowered at the natives, who were regarding him uneasily. Hans began to edge away, until halted by Golding's bellowed command to stop.

"You all saw," Golding addressed them, "that I did nothing. The man Fraser was mad. The sun had burned his brains to water. He would have killed you and then me. He was mad. So I shot him before he could kill us. You saw? That is the story you will tell if any question you. You, Hans? What did you see?"

"I saw all as you have said," Hans replied glibly. "And as I saw, so I speak."

"And you others?"

"It is the same with us."

"It is well to remember that," Golding said grimly, "unless you, too, wish to die."

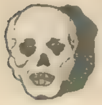
"We shall not forget," they assured him hastily.

"Good!" He indicated the corpse with a contemptuous wave of his hand. "Now bury that."

He turned to the wagon.

"Come on, Bessie. I vant you to put some ointment on my back. Ach! How that —— hurt me vith his vhip."

She meekly followed him, giving one shuddering glance at the dead body, stiffling a scream at the callous way the natives were making preparation for the burial.



"I HAVE done good work today," Golding said with a chuckle after Bessie had dressed his wounds. "M'boza gives me permission to dig and Fraser has gone. All the takings are mine now, Bessie. I pay no vun ten per cent. of the takings. An' me an' you can be as we were before now that —— is dead. It vas self-defense, vasn't it, Bessie. You know that."

"Sure, Alfie," she said absently.

He looked at her keenly; he was a little puzzled by her attitude. Then he rubbed his hands together gleefully as another thought occurred to him.

"I'll tell you vot, Bessie. Tomorrow ve'll go to the missionary feller an' have him marry us. Vot do you say to that?"

"You mean that, Alfie?" she asked sharply. "Or are you just playing with me as you did once before?"

"Of course I mean it. Vhy not? That's settled then, eh? All right. Pretty soon—vhen the sun's lower—ve'll go an' do a bit of digging; we've vasted too much time as it is. Maybe we'll find a stone for a vedding present. You vant to come vith me?"

She shook her head.

"No, Alfie. I want to get ready for tomorrow."

He chuckled and climbing down from the wagon rubbed his hands gleefully together. He hadn't been quite sure of Bessie. She might have told things about the killing of Fraser and about the guns. But he was smart. A woman couldn't give evidence against her husband. Ach! He was clever!

He called his natives to him and they came running—Hans leading the way. He grinned. He was sure of them.

He made a long, bombastic speech, promising them great rewards, repeating again and again that Fraser had been mad, that he would have killed them all if he, Golding, had not first killed him.

Then he gave them all a drink of gin and, telling them to get the mining tools, led the way to the kraal.

He stopped at the hut of M'boza and left a bottle of gin with that blear-eyed native and then, escorted by a bodyguard of warriors, he went on to the Hut of the Flame.

And thereabouts Golding instructed his natives to dig.

With the first thud of a falling pick an old woman rushed out of the hut, screaming the curses, commanding the warriors to kill the white man and his black dogs.

Golding laughed at her.

When one of the warriors shamefacedly confessed that M'boza had given orders that the white man was not to be harmed, she cried something to the effect that M'boza's days of ordering were drawing to a close and rushed at Golding, clawing at him.

He struggled with her, blaspheming, calling on the warriors to drag her off, cursing them when they did not move.

Finally—she was very old and her strength soon left her—he pushed her from him and as she turned to run to the shelter of her hut, he smacked her with the palm of his hand, laughing uproariously at her cry of offended dignity.

"That is how I treat the superstitions of fools," he boasted to the warriors.

They did not reply but eyed each other uneasily. What, they wondered, did the wise woman mean when she said that M'boza's days of ordering were drawing to a close? Assuredly they would seek her counsel when their task of guarding the fat fool was finished—tonight they would go to her. They had no desire to die because they obeyed a fool like M'boza. If Macombe were only chief, he—

But Golding, unconscious of the smoldering fires, was blind to the sullen expressions of the warriors. His attention was riveted on the lump of soil he was carefully crumbling between his hands.

That night the signal drums roared unceasingly.

MILES, the missionary, looked in bewilderment from the man to the woman.

They had come to him, Golding said, to be married. In explanation of this sudden wish to observe the conventions, Golding explained that Fraser had died quite suddenly.

"An' I tell you, mister," he said, "things like that make a man stop an' think."

And then, just as Miles was about to propose that they adjourn to the little tin church that the ceremony might be properly performed, the woman had burst into a loud tirade against Golding.

"Do you think I'd marry that lousy, fat Jew," she screamed. "He's a murderer. He killed Fraser, shot him. He's a dope runner, the dirty —— !"

"Oy! Bessie!" Golding remonstrated. "Don't take no notice of her, mister. She's upset, like. It's the heat an' the excitement vot's done it. Come, Bessie. Let's go an' do it all proper as the reverend says."

"No," she cried. "I won't. I only said I'd marry you so as I could get a white man to hear what I had to say about you. You thought you was smart, didn't you, but—"

"You'd best leave us, mister," Golding said savagely. "I'll talk quiet to her, then she'll be all right. Or maybe we'd better go avay and try again some other time."

He caught her roughly by the arm and moved toward the door but she clutched frantically at Miles' coat and he could not move her.

"No! No!" she implored. "Don't let him take me away. He'll kill me, too."

There was a stealthy patter of naked feet outside the room. Only Miles heard it, but before he could speak the door was flung violently open and naked, paint-daubed warriors rushed into the room.

Six of them flung themselves on Golding while the others stood beside Miles and Bessie, motioning them to keep quiet, their assegais held ready to stab should either show signs of going to Golding's help.

Despite the fat man's tremendous struggles he was soon overpowered, bound and gagged and carried from the room.

The beating of horses' hoofs sounded and then silence—except for Bessie's frightened sobbing and Miles' wrathful—

"What does this mean?"

But the natives who had stood guard over him made no reply.

Miles looked searchingly at them; he thought he recognized them. The big brute who now crossed over to the door—that one he certainly knew.

"Moses!" he called sharply. "What does this mean?"

The warrior—there was nothing of a white man's cookboy about him now—scowled.

"In a little vhile the master comes, *umfundisi*," he said. "Vait. He vill tell you everything he thinks it vell for you to know."

Miles turned to Bessie.

"You are quite safe," he said soothingly. "You won't be harmed!"

"But Alfie?" she sobbed. "What will they do to him?"

"He'll be all right, too," Miles answered with an assurance he was far from feeling.

"I don't care if they kill him," she said vindictively. "It's no more than the rotten pig deserves."

He shrugged his shoulders in puzzled despair.

"Hullo, missioner," a deep voice boomed. "Haven't seen you for a long time."

Miles darted forward to meet the little bandy-legged store-keeper, then halted and said coldly—

"Is this tomfoolery your doings, Isaacs?"

"Sure, missioner," Isaacs answered soberly. "Only it ain't tomfoolery."

"Then what is it?"

"It's serious business, missioner. Say—"

the big voice sounded weird coming from such a puny body—"are you blind? Ain't you seen strange things goin' on?"

"I have." Miles' voice was harsh. "For the past week there's been all kinds of mysterious happenings. My converts talk of witchcraft and say—" his voice took on an accusing note — "that you are at the bottom of it all."

"Isaacs—Big 'Un," Miles went on, "what's it all about? I thought we were to work together for the good of the district, and yet—I haven't been able to see you all this past week; your boys always said you were out when I rode over to your place, and they sniggered and hinted at things. The store's in a disgraceful condition. Your boys— Look at them!"

"They are foony, ain't they? And such muscles Moses has! You'd never suspect it vhen he's vorking in my kitchen, vould you?"

Miles frowned.

"You're trying to put me off, Big 'Un. What is it all about? My district round here's totally deserted, there hasn't been a native near the place these last three days, my mission boys have all left. They told me that it was at your orders; they spoke of witchcraft of which you were responsible. And now there's this."

"You mean that man Golding being taken away?"

Miles nodded.

"Vot vas he doing here?"

"He brought the lady here. He was going to marry her, but—"

"Oy!" Isaacs interrupted and removing his long-visored, loud-checked cloth cap, bowed awkwardly to Bessie. "I didn't see the lady. So he came here to be married, eh? An' I thought he vas runnin' avay. Vell, did you marry 'em?"

"I wouldn't marry him, the lousy pig, if he was the only man on earth!" Bessie exclaimed vehemently.

Isaacs looked at her with interest.

"Vhy not?" he asked, and he pulled thoughtfully at the long lock of black hair which hung down over his forehead.

"I ain't got to tell you. You and him speak the same language."

"Not quite," Isaacs said in a hurt voice.

Bessie sniffed and turned her back on him.

"Vot's it all about, missioner?"

Isaacs listened gravely while Miles told the little he knew.

"Yes, it's all true," he said when Miles concluded. "He's a vaster, that Golding. His boy Hans came to the store this morning and told me about it. But I knew already. I have ears. You have said that many times, not?"

He touched his large outstanding ears.

"But you're not telling me anything, Big 'Un," Miles expostulated. "I'm in the dark. Ever since the Golding party came and I played a fool's part—because that was what I thought you wanted me to do—I've been in the dark."

"You vas very clever that night," Isaacs said with a chuckle. "You made them sure that you vas the sort of man I said you vas; they hadn't any doubts about me. Golding knew himself. He thought I vas like him. Ach! He should have known better. Not all the beasts in one herd are black. An' you threw a lot of good vhisky on the floor, missioner. Oy, vot a vaste!" He smiled reproachfully. "But you did vell. You kept them from vondering vhere I vas an' so I vas able to do a lot of important business vithout them poking in their noses."

"But you still leave me in the dark. What are you going to do about Golding? If he's the beast you and this woman say he is, if he's sold guns to M'boza and killed Fraser—"

"Don't you vorry about him, missioner. He'll be taken care of. Sure he killed Fraser and he sold guns to that fool M'boza. Only he doesn't know that I had made the guns more worthless than vot he supposes; they're as harmless as a popgun; they von't even go *bang!* An' he vould have given M'boza and his men white powder dope, only I stole it. That was vhile you were pretending to be something you vere not. He is all bad—and so he goes to be tried."

"Where, Big 'Un? A fair trial? A white man's trial?"

"Does it matter, missioner? He's guilty an'—an' he ain't a vhite man."

"You're —— right about that, mister," Bessie said with startling suddenness.

"Sure, missioner," Isaacs continued, ignoring the interruption. "You've been in the dark for a long time, longer than vot you think. You got blind vhen you insisted on M'boza being chief. You vas so sure he vas a Christian; he vould lead the people out of darkness. You remember saying that?"

Miles squirmed.

I made a bad mistake there, Big 'Un, but I thought—"

"Sure, you thought he vas all right, missioner. You made a mistake. I'm telling you—as I told you then—that that old heathen, Macombe, is more of a Christian than a lot of your converts. At least he's clean, he keeps his vord and he considers the velfare of his people before all other things. It ain't possible, missioner, to throw down the old gods and give 'em new vuns in vun generation. But no matter. I talk too much. If you made a mistake, I made a bigger vun in helping to make M'boza chief. I *knew* vot he vas. But I thought it vould teach you a lesson; Instead, it came near to causing civil war. Macombe ain't blind an' his follower ain't blind neither. They vhere getting ready to kill me an' you and to oust M'boza. Then Golding comes. That makes things easier for me. They don't von't to kill me an' you any longer an' the wisdom of the old ones is more powerful than assegais. You heard the drums last night, not? Vell, by tomorrow morning Macombe'll be chief again."

"I'm glad," Miles said earnestly. "I've learned my lesson. I walk slowly from now on. But how is it all going to happen."

"You von't like this, missioner," Isaacs answered slowly, "but it had to be, it vas the only vay. Any other vay vould have meant a lot of bloodshed. The people believe that *bayloyi*—evil witches—are at vork; they believe that the evil ones inhabit the bodies either of the chief M'boza and his counselors, or of Macombe and his counselors. The vooman Quarre Quate vas responsible for that belief. I helped a little. And so, these two men, and their people, are going to be put to the *mondjo* test. That is all."

Miles looked very stern, looked as if he were going to make a heated protest, then slumped dejectedly into a chair.

"All the work that I have done," he said sorrowfully, "is undone—and it is my fault. And Golding is undergoing the test too, Isaacs?"

"Sure." Isaacs nodded violently. "It will go hard vith him. He is a fool as vell as a vaster. He insulted Quarre Quate."

"They will kill him, you think?"

"Sure. After they have done other things!"

"But we can't allow that, Big 'Un!"

Isaacs shrugged his shoulders.

"Who cares, missioner?"

Miles shook his head impatiently.

"But it's wrong, Big 'Un. You can see that, surely. I can be blind to the rest—I must be—but as a matter of policy we can't let them kill a white man."

"You're a foony fellow, missioner," Isaacs said slowly. "But you're learning, you're right. Ve can't let 'em kill him; they mustn't kill anyvun. I'll stop them from that—if it ain't too late."

He turned toward the door—a ridiculous looking, misshapen little figure in ill fitting clothes.

"Wait, Big 'Un. I'm coming with you."

"No," Isaacs turned again. "No, you ain't coming, missioner. Things are going to happen today you shouldn't see. You'd try to stop them if you did and then you'd die. It ain't wise to monkey vith a black man's superstitions."

"But you're going to," Miles objected.

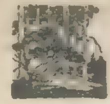
Isaacs smiled. His eyes magnified by the strong-lensed glasses he wore, blazed with a strong light. He seemed of a sudden to be transfigured and his personality filled the room.

Then he smiled again, sadly. The fire left his eyes; his shoulders drooped.

"Yes, I'm goin' to," he said humbly, "but I'm only Samuel Isaacs—storekeeper."

He hastily left the room and when Miles would have followed the way was closed to him by the assegais of Moses and the other servants of Big 'Un, the Jew.

VI



IT SEEMED as if all the world was gathered at the "Place of the Dead." The steeply sloping side of the crater-like depression, at the bottom of which was a shallow, brackish lake, was black with the people of Macombe. They were huddled together so closely that not an inch of the somber gray soil was visible.

At one place only, where the land sloped gently to the lake, was there unoccupied space and there, under a stunted tree which looked as if it had been blasted by volcanic fires, sat the woman Quarre Quate.

On a stool before her was an enormous calabash; in her hand she held a small, drinking gourd. She was naked, but her body smeared with gray ash, had little resemblance to human form. In her hair was fixed a large, blood-red feather. It was the only touch of color in all that vast assemblage and, paradoxically, it was the symbol of death.

At her feet sat a number of old women, all wearing the regalia of witch-doctors. Behind her, the tips of their spears glowing a dull steel color in the shadows, stood her bodyguard, the men who were to enforce her orders during the coming ceremony.

At her right sat the chief, M'boza, and his family and those of his counselors who had decided to throw in their lot with him. At her left sat Macombe, the chief who was, and his active adherents. A little farther away, closely guarded by warriors, was the fat man, Golding. His eyes were bloodshot and he glanced helplessly to the right and to the left; he drooled at the mouth.

Presently Quarre Quate rose and held up her hand.

Instantly all the excited whispering of the people ceased and a great silence followed; so still were the people that the rustle of a vulture's wings—it was flying low—sounded like a mighty gale.

"You know why we are here," Quarre Quate cried; her voice was shrill and piercing. "There has been evil abroad in the land—casters of spells have walked boldly in the day time. Who are they? The bones do not tell save that they be among these or these." She pointed to her right and to her left. "We cried in the night for light and the Great Spirit whispered to me that the *Mondjo* would bring light to us.

"Is it time yet, O you people who watch?"

Like the drone of distant drums the people answered—

"It is time."

"You have heard," continued the woman. "You have heard, O chief that is. You have heard, O chief that was. You have heard O fat white man. It is time. Stand up!"

Like men in a trance they rose to their feet and stared at her—all except Golding. His eyes were fixed appealing on M'boza. But that man could not aid him; he was under the spell of the woman.

"You are thirsty—" Golding shivered at the torture of the woman's voice— "come and drink. You, first, M'boza; you and those who are with you."

With stilted steps M'boza led the way to where Quarre Quate was sitting. She filled the small gourd with the tepid, evil-smelling liquid the large one contained.

"Drink!" she commanded curtly, and watched him closely as he tilted back his head and drained the gourd dry.

He was led then by warriors and told to sit close to the water's edge—there the cliff shadows did not reach—facing Quarre Quate.

"Do not move," they told him. "Do not scratch yourself. It is forbidden."

The others quickly filed before Quarre Quate—M'boza's people.

Each one was made to drink and then placed as M'boza was placed, given similar instructions.

Warriors dragged Golding before the woman. She held out the gourd to him but he refused to take it—tried to break away—bellowed with rage and fear. His eyes bulged from their sockets, his jaw sagged. He implored, he threatened, he offered great rewards.

The warriors tripped him and as he lay foaming and squirming on the ground, they poured the stuff down his throat. They then carried him away and placed him beside M'boza. His face was deathly white now and all fight had left him. He retched horribly.

"He is a caster of spells," the people cried. "Take him away."

The warriors picked him up and put him in a place by himself; they did not bother to guard him now. He was too nauseated to move.

Macombe and his people now filed before the woman and they too drank, they too were seated with their backs to the water; they, too, were told not to move, not to scratch themselves.

And now Quarre Quate rose and began to dance before them, and as she danced, she glared at them with wide open eyes.

They followed her every movement. As she went to the right or to the left their heads turned mechanically as if worked by one brain.

Presently M'boza scratched his arm.

Screaming, foaming at the mouth, Quarre Quate stopped before him and, taking the feather from her hair, placed it in his, over his forehead. He tried to pull it out but clutched only the air to the right or the left of it. His efforts became frantic—finally he toppled over and squirmed helplessly on the ground.

"He is a caster of spells," the cry went up. "Take him away."

Quarre Quate retrieved her feather and began dancing again. Warriors carried M'boza to the place where Golding lay groaning.

Another and another fell, as M'boza had fallen. The ranks of the chief were thinning rapidly.

One man jumped to his feet and turning, ran into the water. He fell face forward with a mighty splash; he struggled to his knees, fell again and after a little while struggled no more. Another tried to speak but could only say, "*Be-be-be.*" His saliva was dried up, his jaws were locked, he could not speak. It was evidence of guilt; he was *baloyi*. They carried him away.

Soon, none were left but Macombe and his people. They sat gazing stolidly before them, motionless, their eyes slightly glazed.

"*Selekan!*" Quarre Quate shouted and returned to her seat.

At her order Macombe and his people rose and rushed into the water where they scrubbed themselves with the mud; then, having cleansed themselves, they returned to Quarre Quate.

She gave them each three pinches of a white powder. One they threw over the right shoulder, another over the left, the third they swallowed to counteract the defilement of the poison.

A mighty roar came from the throats of the watchers.

"*Au-a!* It is finished."

"Finished indeed," Quarre Quate shouted. "The spirits have spoken. What now? Will you have M'boza, who is *baloyi*, for your chief?"

"Nay!" they answered.

"Who then?"

"Who but Macombe! *Au-a!*"

"Then what is to be done with M'boza?"

"It is known to you," they answered. "Let it be done to him and those with him—but first the white man—as custom has it."

"You have heard, sisters," Quarre Quate said to the women at her feet.

They sprang to their feet and rushed with shrill shouts of ghoulish glee upon the little band of the doomed.

They milled furiously about Golding while M'boza and those others looked on apathetically.

It was then that Isaacs, the storekeeper, came to where Macombe and the woman were seated. His clothing was torn to shreds, his face was lined by deep, bleeding scratches, he looked like a man who had fought his way through hell.

Macombe looked at him in amazement.

"How came you here, Big Heart? Do you not know that it is death for a white man to see what you have seen?"

"It is no matter how I came," he panted. "They—" he pointed to the people who lined the steep sides of the crater—"were all looking down here; they did not see me until I had passed—then they pushed me on my way. And I have seen nothing, Macombe. My eyes were blinded."

"For what have you come?"

"To ask a favor. There must be no killing."

"The customs cannot be set aside, Big Heart."

"They must be or I will open my eyes and tell these people the truth of all that has been done here. Speak quickly. Give orders, Quarre Quate, to your sisters to stay their hands. The white man must live; M'boza and his people shall be sent from the district—their names shall be forgotten. That is punishment enough and it is a thing allowed by the traditions. Golding you shall give to me. He is for me to deal with as I think fit. It is little I ask and I have done a lot."

Macombe turned uncertainly to Quarre Quate.

"What say you," he asked.

"It is true, Macombe," she answered. "The traditions allow what he asks—and he has done much—it is little he asks. He has always been our friend. Let it be as he says."

"But the people—"

"*Tchat!* They will see as I tell them to see."

She gave orders to her body guard and they ran swiftly to where the old women were bending over Golding and dispersed them.

They lifted the fat man and put him on the ground at Isaacs' feet; then they returned and stood guard over M'boza and his people.

The storekeeper bent over Golding, shuddered, and then dressed the man's gaping wounds as best he could, using his tattered remnants of clothing for bandages.

From the people came a roar of angry disappointment.

"Silence!" Macombe shouted angrily.

But it was Quarre Quate's voice which stilled the threatening murmurs.

She raised her voice then in the hymn to Kabula Kagorra—the Great God.

THREE weeks later Miles and Isaacs stood on the brow of a hill watching a wagon which was slowly weaving its way down the crooked trail. Presently it disappeared from view and Miles said softly, as they turned back to the mission:

"At least he's not lost everything. Bessie will take care of him. She is very brave."

"Yah!" Isaacs agreed absently.

"You know," Miles continued, "I was overwhelmed with surprize when she came to me this morning and announced that she wanted me to marry her to that poor, maimed, blinded wreck of a man. Poor fellow! He's paid heavily for his crimes. But the woman—I misjudged her, Big 'Un. She's made of the stuff of angels."

"Yah!" Isaacs grunted, then muttered to himself, "It 'ud have been kinder to have left him to the 'sisters' of Quarre Quate than marry him to that ——'s fury."

He was thinking of the vindictive light in Bessie's eyes as Golding had spoken the words which made them man and wife. And he could not forget the rasp in her voice as she climbed on to the driver's seat of the wagon, picked up the reins and told Golding to "shut his jaw." She intended, Isaacs knew, to make that man pay—now that he was blind and helpless—for all the misery he had caused her.

But Isaacs did not want Miles to know that. The missionary had seen so much evil of late, and if his belief in the goodness of Bessie cheered him up, why—

"Yah!" he grunted again. "She's an angel all right."

VII

WHEN the magnificent church at Misongwe was dedicated by the Bishop of Mashonaland, there was not a vacant pew in the place. All of Macombe's people—men, women, and children—were present and in the front pews sat the newly appointed white administrators of the country. Besides them were the military and high civil servants of the parent colony and clergymen of all creeds.

The special hymn of dedication—written specially for the occasion by a local storekeeper, a mimeographed leaflet informed the visitors—was founded on the folk songs of the people.

There was something tremendously inspiring about its cadence, and the oft-repeated words "Kabula Kagorra" sounded like a mighty battle cry.

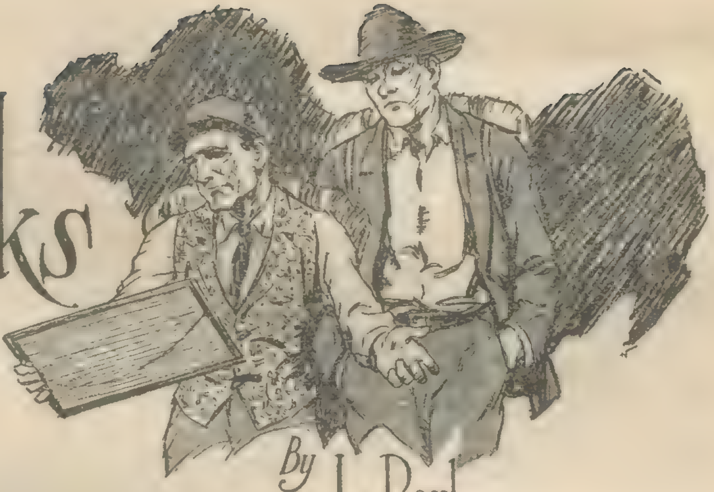
In a pew at the back of the church sat Isaacs, the storekeeper. He was dressed in a suit of sober black, but his love for color was expressed in his many hued shirt and brilliant necktie. Many of the visitors nodded patronizingly to him when they later inspected the church; one congratulated him on his broadmindedness in attending the service of a "so different" creed from his own.

Isaccs bowed humbly in acknowledgment of the compliment.

He was quite content. His friend Miles was happy; white men who knew him called him Big 'Un, and his people—the people of Macombe the Chief—called him Great Heart.

He felt, when he heard that, that his cup of happiness was full to running over.

Meeks



By L. Paul

Author of "The Guardsman," "Stummicks," etc.

"I CAN see it growing on ye, this trick o' taking offense."

Old Bill Stevens glowered at his partner, "Flatfoot" Hawkins, erstwhile corporal of the Guards, but now recruit trapper. "I can see ye sneerin' at them pine trees, frownin' at God's own handiwork. And while I pity ye, Flatfoot, and know what ails ye, this takin' offense has got to stop."

The pair of them had wintered in the north bush, trapping. Flatfoot had drifted in before the freeze-up, fresh from the crowded London barracks of the Guards that had, hitherto, been home to him. Now with the last snow vanishing they were sitting outside the cabin watching the swollen river below, their bodies comfortable in the early afternoon sun of spring.

"——!" Flatfoot failed to wipe off that frown. "It's so—so perishin' lonely, and Lunnon, Lunnon in the smoke, chum—"

"Lonely!" Bill Stevens snorted disgustedly. "Ain't we seen a bear or a deer or a moose nigh every day since the snow started to go? And ain't that a woodpecker knockin' —— off yonder stump this very minute? Mebbe they ain't crowds like you was used to before I reformed ye into decent private folks, but if it's crowds ye must have, why, there's a promisin' anthill down on the open land yonder—"

Flatfoot, a big man, rose and stretched.

"——," he repeated "Crowds, chum, crowds. In a Chelsea pub, say, with a glarse of port or pint o' bitter, and the place crammed and smellin' human, and the lads cursin' and tellin' stories, tall ones. And outside a nice thick fog with the coppers' helmets shinin' in the street lights, and the pavements all slippy and bright. And little ragged nippers, by the curb, to beg a ha'penny of you when you come out, feeling generous. Well, chum, you've not seen it, Lunnon, so what's the use of talking about it. But it's home, that's all."

"So that's it." Old Bill took a sudden resolve. "Crowds ye would see, eh? And a drink or two, ye'd have, maybe, as well? Flatfoot, I'm broadminded, I am, and a good partner ye will be after I've shown ye the nine hundred odd things ye have yet to learn. So rather than have ye get homesick and bite yerself like a mad dog, it's crowds we'll look for. 'Tis two weeks before the sports begin to come up here to be guided about, and a bit over a hundred mile south o' this is a town called Colby that'll make Lunnon look like summer rabbit fur. It's a holiday we'll have, Flatfoot."

The big Englishman greeted the announcement in silence.

"It'll not be pleasant for me, this mixin' up with strange humans," Old Bill went on. "And ye must obey orders and act careful when in that there populous center I'm takin' ye to. No more o' this takin' offense which same I've warned ye against. I seen many a man take offense and most times he's took six foot o' earth along with it. For instance ye might have heard of Cassidy."

"Second cousin of mine. Copper in Liverpool," Flatfoot answered.

"This Cassidy wasn't. Leastwise if he's a copper now 'tis in a warmer spot." Old Bill lighted his pipe, drew deeply, then went on: "Shot a grizzly, did Cassidy, this bein' out West. A lonely old coot was Cassidy, so he had the bear stuffed and set up in his shack, for company. Looked nat'ral, too. Till a couple o' boys got filled up on red-eye an', comin' in to call, informal onlimbers their .45's, thinkin' this bear was still alive and r'arin' to go. Well, Flatfoot, they spoiled his smile, they did. After old Cassidy sent a charge o' buckshot at 'em he turned to look his fur-bearin' statoo over. And the bear was starin' at him peculiar, one of them heavy slugs havin' sort o' disconnected his lower jaw!

" 'You needn't look at me like that. I never done it.' Old Cassidy remarks, peeved-like. 'Me, I been a father to ye ever since we met up. Who filled ye full of nice clean sawdust and set ye up there in this warm cabin? Who but Cassidy that ye sneer at for his pains!' And to speak the truth the bear sure had a mean sneer for him, with its jaw all twisted like it was.

" 'So look pleasant,' Old Cassidy warns him. 'Look like the grateful grizzly ye should be, or I'll visit the sins of the father on eight or nine generations of bears.'

"Well, sir, for a week old Cassidy bore up under it, warnin' that poor dead bear to look pleasant and waitin' for him to take the hints that was gettin' rougher every day. But o' course the bear kep' right on sneerin' at him just the same, bein' just sawdust and dead fur, though innocent.

"The eighth day old Cassidy gets up and looks at the grizzly. If anything, the critter was sneerin' harder than before. 'That settles it,' says old Cassidy, reaching for his rifle and six-guns. 'If you got any messages of condoliance for them kindred o' yourn about to die,' says he, 'if you wants me to speak sympathetic words in their dyin' ears, bear, you shout some words plumb hurried. For I'm going to even our score, you sneerin' ongrateful animile. I'm goin' to wipe out every grizzly between Alaska and sunny Californy.'

"And after waiting patient for a minute in case that there sawdust-stuffed grizzly should get reasonable and smile, old Cassidy starts out to do that same brutal deed. Takin' offense where no offense was meant done it. Bein' tetchy, well, he got tetched-tetched hard and sudden by three bears at once. Leastwise that's how we read the signs when we found the barrel o' his rifle and his boots and had a look at the tracks. I often wondered how old Cassidy agreed with them bears. If he did agree 'twas the first time in his life, him bein' the kind that takes offense. So, Flatfoot Hawkins, you'd best reform. There ain't no bears in Colby, where we're goin' for this little spree, but if ye start tellin' them proud citizens how good Lunnon is they'll argy with ye, and then, if so be ye take offense, we'll have a fight."

"S'welp me chum," Flatfoot protested. "I'm meek, I am. Wouldn't hurt a fly."

"Then don't start a fight for me to finish," Bill advised. "Keep right on bein' meek. Crowds is pizen. If it pleases ye to see 'em, and smell 'em and hear 'em, well and good. But don't argy with 'em, or get mad at 'em. And now we'd best snug up here. We'll start out tomorrow."

II

"NOW where may you be going?" asked Danby, the owner of the Stoppin' Place, as the two partners came up from the river at noon the next day.

"Explorin'," Bill Stevens replied. "This here pardner of mine is tired of lookin' at trees and I'm taking him on a real reckless bust. Crowds he wants and crowds he'll get. And there's no use argyin' with him. I know a man's better off up here, and you know that crowds ain't healthy, but this here Flatfoot is pinin' away for the sight o' folks in bunches, and me, I'm humorin' him."

Flatfoot Hawkins scowled at him.

"I didn't ask you to start traveling," he complained. "What's the use giving a starving man half a sody cracker? I speak kind words concernin' Lunnon in the smoke, that's half the ruddy world, and, strike me blinkin' well pink, you drag me down to some little town that Gawd had left over when he finished making the cities."

"Mind this here taking offense I warned ye against," Bill cautioned him. "And when riled go slow. Now, Danby, old-timer, seein' how we're aimin' to mingle, we got to doll up. Flatfoot here's got the bloke clothes he wore in last fall, but me—" he glanced down at his patched trousers, worn coat, and red flannel shirt—"not wantin' no rows, and not wishin' to start nothin', I figger I'd best rig out fashionable. I'm goin' to be one of them folks dressed '*commy fow*' that melts into the crowd when the rows starts. So open up that there swindle mill, you old crook, and trot out glad rags, proper for town."

Danby scratched his head.

"I ain't got much," he replied, leading them into the store. "'Cept this." He rummaged beneath a pile of goods on a long counter and pulled out a garment. "I keep her here under these red blankets so she wont feel lonely, bein' what you might call bright."

He held the article up for their inspection.

Flatfoot Hawkins snorted, then covered his mouth with one big hand.

"What's biting you?" Bill asked.

Flatfoot saw no answering merriment on his partner's face. Danby, too, seemed to be acting in good faith.

"Touch o' croup," Flatfoot apologized. "What may that be?"

"This here is the only hand-embroidered, silk-and-satin vest this side o' civilization," Danby explained proudly. "I ain't sayin' it's perfect, but 'tis hand made and the wife worked all winter on it. It's the women gets the big idees, every time. Me, I was all for throwing away them hanks of colored yarn the danged wholesaler sent up for samples with my last shipment, but the wife she objects. 'Give them to me,' says she 'and that old green silk vest, and a couple of needles and the yarn'. Bein' married I done so. Likewise she done thus and so." And Danby waved the vest proudly before his customers.

"She sure is a vest—there's no denyin'." Bill Stevens examined the work of art carefully.

The wholesaler had sent samples of the more violent primary colors. He had heard somewhere that simple northland folks liked their hues brilliant and strong. And if Danby's half-breed wife had an artistic sense, it was inherited from the Indian side of her ancestry. Reds and blues fought with greens and yellows and the original faded green background. As a final delicate touch she had sewed on big pearl buttons.

"It's a vest, right enough," Bill conceded. "But is it for wearin' or just for show? I wouldn't want Flatfoot nor yet me to look like jays when we hit town."

"If it ain't fashionable it ought to be," Danby assured him. "An' if it ain't the style wore by the best dressers it's just 'cause nobody's give it a start."

"It looks too small for me," Flatfoot Hawkins protested with great presence of mind. "Besides it looks sort of funny."

"Funny? It just needs a start," Danby protested, huffily. "Take britches, now. I'll bet the first man that wore 'em looked funny, too. But they sure are popular nowadays with even female women movin' into 'em. 'Tis a proper vest for a pioneer, that's what, and three dollars takes it."

"She's took." Bill Stevens shed his coat. "I'm an old man, but ye needn't laugh at me, Flatfoot Hawkins, you that wore a red coat and fur bonnet in them Guards. No, sir. You got no cause for merriment just because I've a hankerin' for bright things in my old age. Besides, I kind o' figger one of us must look sort of cityfied. Them town birds picks on bush runners and to avoid rows I'm dressin' metropolitan. Why, with that there vest shoutin' the news they'll maybe take me for a Lunnon dook."

The vest fitted, after a fashion.

"Kind o' wish you had a lookin' glass," Bill strutted up and down. "Must knock your eyes out, this here handsome garmint on a handsome man. I can feel her warmin' me inside, already. And now, Flatfoot, we'll start. There's nigh sixty mile o' trail between us and End o' Steel and we'll make as much as we can of it by dark. If this glad rag makes the hit in Colby that it does with me and Flatfoot, Danby, the trail'll be wore smooth by your customers before we get back. You start that wife o' yours workin'. I'm a grateful man and I'll advertise this here work of art proper."

MID-AFTERNOON found the partners well along the trail. It was rough going, and warm with the sudden warmth of spring. Windless it was, too, for the forest came down to the rude trail on either hand, a dark wall that shut off the faint breeze which fanned the tree tops. Old Bill shucked his coat and bundled it on top of his pack.

The vest shone in all its glory, like a bed of spring flowers.

Ahead of them, bushes crackled. Then a big buck deer bounded into the trail, landed facing them, head up, rigid.

For a few seconds it held this posture, then wheeled, and sprang across open ground into the woods on the other side.

"There ye are, Flatfoot," Old Bill explained the phenomenon. "Nother case o' taking offense where none was meant. This here buck ought to have jumped clean across when he sighted ye. But no! 'A tenderfoot,' thinks he, 'a dumned bloke tenderfoot in my private bush. It's not to be put up with,' and so he stands there a bit, starin' red eyed. If 'twas the proper season that would have give us time to shoot him."

"Maybe he wasn't lookin' at me." Flatfoot eyed the gay vest as he replied. "And anyways if he did take offense at—well at any funny thing he saw, he didn't stay to get into a jam, but jumped clear when he'd made up his mind."

"Course he did," Bill explained, airily. "He thinks— 'After all, God made this Flatfoot Hawkins and old Bill here is lookin' after him, and the combination is reference enough.' So he beat it without reasonin' it out with ye. But he took offense and was in danger thereby, just the same, him stoppin' there like he done. And don't ye say different or I'll get mad. Let's get on, or you'll be aggravatin' a bear and, not having no guns with us, we're men o' peace."

III

THE train left End of Steel an hour before dawn. Old Bill and Flatfoot holed up aboard her on the siding the night that they came to the railroad.

"For," said Bill Stevens, "that there writin' on the blackboard yonder says she leaves at five, but most folks is apt to lie at times and railroad folks is no better'n others. So we'll just sneak into the last car and sleep there."

The train pulled out in the darkness before dawn. A brakeman, still half asleep, came down the aisle of the last car, rubbing his eyes. But opposite old Bill's seat he paused and, though he continued to rub his eyes, he was no longer sleepy. For old Bill's coat was open—the vest, even in the dim light of the train lamps, shone resplendent.

The brakeman came along to the rear of the car. Flatfoot Hawkins, like the old soldier he was, having discovered running water, both hot and cold, was taking as much of a bath as the proprieties of travel would permit.

"Friend of yourn?" asked the brakeman, jerking a thumb toward the sleeping Bill Stevens.

Flatfoot nodded.

"Is he, now, as you might say, kindhearted?" asked the brakeman.

"One of the best," Flatfoot replied. "All heart, is Bill Stevens."

"And reasonable?" the brakeman persisted.

"Why, chum, he's all reason, that's what."

"Then—" the brakeman was all one broad grin— "you go ask him to stand out on the back platform till dawn. That there tail light won't burn right, and his vest—"

He fell silent. The snicker he was indulging in died in his throat. For he was looking, at close range, upon a large and hairy fist. His eye took in, also, Flatfoot's lengthy arm with the lean ropy muscles lying along it. And, if further warning was needed, Flatfoot was giving it.

"Smart you are, chum, but hark to me. One word more, one —— word more, old soldier, and there'll be a burial party before breakfast. Arms reversed and heads low, and they're hangin' of Danny Deever in the mornin'."

"No offense," the brakeman backed away. "I was just jokin'."

"Strike me —— well pink, must you pick on Bill?" Flatfoot got madder as he talked. "Him that's been straight with me, square and kind when I needed kindness! Hark to me, old soldier. If that old man was wearin' plush pants and a busby I wouldn't let the Colonel of the Guards pass no remarks, let alone a lousy greasy guard aboard a stinking old train like this."

"If that there's your attitude you'd best ride right through to Montreal," the brakeman laughed. "Don't stop at Colby."

"And why not?" asked Flatfoot pugnaciously.

"There ain't a good hospital at Colby." The brakeman swung the rear door open. "And a hospital'll be your happy home if you try to make them small town sports swaller that vest." He went out slamming the door after him.

"Hey, Flatfoot," old Bill Stevens had wakened. "What's bitin' that there man with the blue suit? You ain't been takin' no offense already, have ye?"

"We was discussin' styles." Flatfoot came back to their seat.

"You was?"

"And he sort o' agreed with me," Flatfoot concluded. "Now if you want a wash-up they got hot and cold back yonder, and a fair treat it is, I can tell you, chum."

"I keeps that word 'treat' sacred," Bill protested. "Sacred for hot and cold that comes out of bottles and goes down throats and don't ye go wastin' no enthusiasm on water and it so cheap and plentiful. Do ye suppose there's barrooms in Colby?"

Discreet inquiries from fellow travelers settled old Bill's doubts on the subject. Barrooms there were, illegal but yet accessible. At his order Flatfoot scribbled the addresses of several blind pigs on the margin of a week-old newspaper.

By this time the train was getting out of the wilderness. Occasional farms, won from the bushland, came down to the tracks on either side. Then small clusters of houses appeared. Finally the town of Colby itself, a small frontier place with just enough modern improvements to make it conceited.

"Sidewalks 'n everything." Old Bill was like a child, pointing out marvels to his partner. "An' autymobiles, Flatfoot. I figger you'll be havin' them in that Lunnon you rave over one o' these days, though I've heard tell how you Britishers is slow."

Flatfoot took it all in silence. Londoners don't need to boast. Their city is above jealousy, as, in their estimation, it is above criticism.

"Better snug up that there coat," he advised as the train slowed for the station. "Bit nippy yet."

"And why?" Old Bill swung the coat wide open as he stood up. "I ain't goin' to hide my glory, not me. Three dollars worth o' fashionable raiment, and he wants me to hide it! No, sir. Colby's goin' to get everything that's comin' to it."

He pushed the reluctant Flatfoot toward the door of the car.

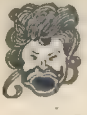
"Now mind," he cautioned, "don't ye go gettin' crazy mad. These here folks in cities is born fools, else they'd live elsewhere. So don't take them serious. Think of Cassidy and his grizzly bear and remember that the meek is blessed."

"Righto." Flatfoot stepped down to the platform. His voice, however, sounded doubtful.

The usual crowd of small town loafers stood idly about the station.

Old Bill wasted but a single glance on them.

"No-count folks, them," he warned. "Now you an' me, bein' representative citizens of all parts north, ain't goin' to mix with none but the best people. Besides, that there big lad is laughin' sort o' foolish. Mebbe he's an idjit."



FLATFOOT cast an apprehensive glance at the big loafer whom Bill had noticed. The man was laughing, right enough. Also his eyes were fixed on the nobby bit of raiment, that varmint vest, that was by now the pride of old Bill's heart. Flatfoot Hawkins felt a wave of rage sweeping over him; rage at old Bill for wearing such a riotous garment as that vest; rage at Danby for selling it; but most of all rage at strangers who presumed to laugh at it and his simple old partner. He stepped across the platform, walking on his toes, his face stern, his eyes cold.

"What may you be grinnin' at, like an ape?" he asked the big loafer.

"Hey, hey!" All unconscious of Flatfoot's mixed motives, Bill Stevens came after him, his voice raised in alarm. "Hey, Flatfoot—what the —— you doin'! Don't you go takin' offense at nothin'. Don't ye mind him, lads, he ain't town broke yet."

"What you want to know?" the loafer asked truculently.

"You was grinnin'. Why?" Flatfoot lifted his clenched fists, measured his distance.

"You come away from this." Bill Stevens had come up with him, had grabbed him by the shoulder. As Flatfoot struck at the big loafer old Bill swung him round.

"Of all the cantankerous merrymakin' I ever seed this is the worst," old Bill complained. "Here we come down for a good time and you go startin' wars right and left. Somethin' has got to be done about it."

"You'd best lock the wild man up," the big loafer suggested. "Me, I ain't sore because he wanted to beat me up, knowin' my strength. Butch Ludy's reputation is made hereabouts, anyway. But this is a man's town, stranger, and if that there sorehead lets loose at some o' our folks he'll wear daisies, lyin' prone."

Flatfoot tried to wrench clear of his partner's grip.

"He was laughin'," he complained bitterly.

"Laughin' at what?" old Bill asked pointedly. "You weren't laughin' at me, was you, mister?"

The big loafer, a coward at heart, was not willing to antagonize the man who held the tall stranger in leash. "Never a laugh," he assured old Bill.

"And ye ain't laughin' at this here pardner o' mine, neither? Cause if ye are, I'd best warn ye, he's bad tempered is Flatfoot, an' I'm not wantin' him to start nothin'."

"Peaceful folks, you are!" The loafer's voice grew a shade more confident. This old nut evidently had the big stranger under control.

"No, sir, I ain't aimin' to have him start no war," Bill went on. "Ye see, he ain't tidy in his blood-lettin' is Flatfoot here. When he starts beatin' folks up he'll maybe leave one or two o' them able to crawl away, an' bein' his pardner that means I got to shuck my coat and clean up after him. Ye see my point?" He paused. The big loafer saw it, right enough.

"Do I take a crack at him or not?" asked Flatfoot morosely. "I don't like his face. I don't like his manners and this elevating conversation don't make no sense to me. He laughed, and nobody will laugh at—"

"You come away from here." Old Bill swung him about and started for the street. "And, mister," he called back over his shoulder, "this here tetchy cuss was in the wrong, maybe, an' I don't let him mix things every time he wants to. But that's no sign he can't handle hisself, neither."

"Stow the guff," Flatfoot grumbled. "A —— of a holiday this is."

"You a Britisher, and not reckernizin' diplomatics? It's plain you don't, Flatfoot, for a fact. Me, I'm scatterin' the seeds o' good will."

"And how?" Flatfoot Hawkins asked curiously.

"First of all, by stoppin' your bloodthirsty comics," Bill replied. "An' secondly by makin' it plain to this Butch Ludy, the local champeen yonder, that if and when you does start, you becomes twins."

"Me twins!" gasped Flatfoot.

"Sure," Bill explained. "Trouble twins, one bein' named Flatfoot and fightin' with his hands, and the other called Bill Stevens and battlin' with his head."

"Gawd forbid!" snorted Flatfoot, glancing at the beautiful vest and remembering the tendency of twins to dress alike.

"Now lets forget it." Old Bill began to point out the local sights. "Look at them stores, all windies and everything. If Danby saw 'em he'd be jealous, him with just that old shack. An' say, Flatfoot, sure as I live there's a shop sellin' nothing but picters. Lets go look." He guided his partner across the street. The window of a small store was his goal; a window filled with cheap framed pictures and mottoes.

"Purty, aint they. Don't look like nothin', for sure," Bill remarked. "But then, what's a man want with a framed picter of a tree that looks like a tree, when he can see thousands of the real thing? No sir. I likes my art artistic, like them. You can't rightly tell what sort of trees them are, can you, Flatfoot, which is the p'int and purpose of art. And say, come in. Come on in." Old Bill grabbed his big partner by the shoulder and hurried him through the door of the shop.

"That one there in the corner of the windy, ma'am," he commanded of the flurried girl behind the counter. "We need that, we do, ma'am. This here pardner of mine's proud and tetchy, ye see, and that there motto was made for him."

"Strike me pink," Flatfoot Hawkins grumbled. "Mottoes! It's bad enough havin' you dinning them words into me mornin', noon and night without havin' them printed out plain on—"

"Read her. Read her. And thank your stars I don't hang her round your stiff neck," Old Bill cried, holding up the article in question. It was in a frame and the sprawling script read—

"Blessed are the Meek."

"Them's my sentiments, Flatfoot." Old Bill threw a wad of bills on the counter. "Help yourself, lady, and give us the change quick. Now we got fight insurance we aims to do a bit of drinkin'. You tie this here noble advice up good and tight and pass it to my partner, Battlin' Flatfoot Hawkins. Mebbe it'll make a mouse of him till we gets clear of this wicked city."

IV

"NOW this here'll look familiar to ye, Flatfoot." Old Bill waved a hand around, as if to give his partner the freedom of the large and dirty room in which they sat. "This here secret drinkin' den that the police keeps away from'll remind you of them so-called pubs o' Lunnon town."

"Struth," Flatfoot groaned. "Why, chum, this is messy, this is. If I could take you into an English pub you'd call it a palace. Look at that—that feller in dirty shirtsleeves, yonder, him with the three-days' beard."

"That's the smilin' bartender," Bill explained. "I 'spose none o' the barkeeps in Lunnon wears three day beards!"

"Beards," Flatfoot grinned. "Strike me pink, chum, beards! Lumme if you only could lay eyes on them, and ask them if they wears three-day beards—"

"Tetchy you are, and cracked, ye cackler, laughin' at your own jokes, which, being bloke, I can't see through," Bill grumbled. "And if you think I dassn't ask them English barkeeps a civil question you got another think coming."

"And they'd answer, bein' polite, specially if you was to call them 'Miss,'" Flatfoot assured him.

"Miss!" old Bill goggled. "Don't go inventin' yarns like that. Bars and Misses don't mix, nowhere."

"They do in England," Flatfoot explained. "Haven't you heard tell of barmaids? I used to walk out with one—fine girl too, but nothin' come of it. She held she was above me, her tending saloon and private bars at the Chelsea Star and Garter."

"He's gone! Clean gone!" Bill groaned. "Think back a bit, Flatfoot old scout. Wasn't it a dairy, now? For I heard tell of dairy maids and milkmaids often enough. Now mebbe you was trundled in by your ma to get your bottle filled."

"Man's milk it was, chum." Flatfoot eyed his half-emptied glass, resentfully. "Not this here brass polish—and handed out proper by a barmaid. This ruddy smiling bartender'd take the thirst out of any one."

"Now don't ye go gettin' offended cause he ain't dressed proper." Bill sized the barkeeper up. "Husky he is, big as you. And that nose o' his was likely bust professional, throwin' bums out. Besides he's the source o' what licker we get. Speak him polite. Here he comes. Something familiar about that face if I could place it."

The bartender sauntered over. The room was empty save for the two partners.

"Business is slow," he reported. "You folks strangers?"

"Strangers is right." Bill Stevens grinned up at him. "And aimin' to sample this here licker till it gets familiar."

"Stayin' long?" asked the bartender. "My name's Ludy, brother of Butch Ludy. Mebbe you seen him down to the depot. He hangs out there. Some man, Butch, twice as strong as me. And your names?"

Flatfood Hawkins glared at him.

"I'm a Meek," he grunted. "And if you ask why, spit your questions at this here old perishin' bushrat that christened me."

The bartender's smile of welcome vanished.

"You won't get far in these parts with that smart aleck stuff. What do you mean 'Meek?'"

"Now don't ye get riled at him. He's foreign," old Bill explained. "Pass over that there motto, Flatfoot."

He grabbed the flat parcel, stripped off the paper and held up the framed legend:

"Blessed are the Meek."

"That sort of Meek, eh?" The barkeep read it, glanced at old Bill's gorgeous vest. "You don't mean to tell me that you're a Meek too, old-timer?"

"And why not?" asked Bill Stevens. "If there's a fambly of Meeks I'm the man they calls grand-daddy. I'm so blamed meek a rabbit can run me a mile just wagglin' his ears at me."

"You don't dress the part."

The bartender turned away toward the door where a group of four was entering. Three of them were ordinary-looking customers, a bit roughly dressed. They seemed to be at home in the blind pig. The fourth was Butch Ludy himself, a bit the worse for liquor.

"'Lo Butch," the barkeep called. "My brother," he explained, speaking over his shoulder to the partners.

"'Lo Bill." Butch led his gang to a table across the room. "Wanna speak to you," he went on, his eye kindling as he saw old Bill and Flatfoot.

The bartender, Biff Ludy, sauntered over.

"Now look what ye done." Old Bill placed the motto face up on the table. "If there's a friendlier thing by nature than a barkeep I ain't met up with it. And you go offendin' this Biff first crack. A Meek! Who ever heard tell of a Meek?"

"You tell of Meeks till I'm sick of them," Flatfoot rejoined.

"And what's more you're the patriarch of the ruddy Meek tribe by your own words."

"Backin' your fool play," Bill explained patiently. "Takin' the edge off that there Britisher wit. Flatfoot, after hearin' your pleasant holiday conversation with every stranger we meet up with I can figger how you English is always having wars. You talks fighting talk when promenadin' social, and —— knows what you say when you get mad."

"That Butch lad's talking fighting talk right now," Flatfoot pointed out, as the four men settled themselves at the other table, and ordered drinks. Evidently, from the way he eyed the partners, Butch remembered the morning's affair at the station. "And that dirty messy bartender, bein' his brother, makes it five to two. And if we don't have to mop up the Ludy family I'm not a Meek, that's what."

Old Bill eyed him apprehensively.

"Flatfoot, you're the gloomiest idjit I ever circulated with. You ought to get a job predictin' hard winters."

"Cloudy, with squalls," Flatfoot retorted. "This Butch chap is hardenin' his heart and his fists and talking serious dirt, I tell you. And who pointed out where his brother got that dint on his beak? Who but you? Throwin' bums out! Thanks! We may not be bums, Bill Stevens, but there's throwin' out in daily orders. The battalion'll parade with bottles and chairs, that's what. I seen fights in pubs before. I been in them. Likewise I've marched the guard in and wiped up what was left, and a dirty business such little sociable wars was, even when started friendly, for excitement. And this'll be a grudge fight."

Old Bill bent over, fumbled under the table.

"What're you doing?" asked Flatfoot.

"You may be dreamin' dreams, Meek," Bill replied. "And you may be just talking sensible and second sighted. So, to be on the safe side I'm taking off my boots. I fights freer sockfooted."

"Hang 'em round your neck," Flatfoot advised. "You won't have no time to come back for 'em. Listen to them louts laughin'."

The four at the other table had emptied their glasses. Butch Ludy pulled out his watch.

"Scarce 2 P.M. and here's sunset come to Colby ahead o' time," he roared.

"Don't get excited," Bill admonished Flatfoot, laying a cautionary hand on his shoulder. "Don't start nothin'. This here is city wit, and we can't see it proper. Let 'em laugh at you if they like. Though why 'sunset' I don't know."

"Laugh at *me*." Flatfoot lost all restraint at last. "Why, you old goat they're laughing at you—you and that scenic vest. Strike me pink, Bill Stevens, that there garment'd start a world war."

"You—you don't mean it, Flatfoot?" Bill stared at his big partner. "You ain't hintin' that all along, with the feller in the blue suit on the train, for instance, and with the big bum Butch yonder—not to mention that there buck deer—you ain't meanin' that they was all riled by this here vest—that it was me they sneered at?"

Flatfoot colored.

"I—I wasn't goin to tell you, and you so proud of that vest, Bill Stevens. I aimed to stand 'em off and make 'em swallow it, one and all. But you, with your taking offense talk, and this here signboard, druv me wild. There, it's out, the truth. That vest isn't fit for no man to wear 'cept a clown. But what are you doing now?"

"Don't you ask fool questions." Bill rose. "If them bums wants trouble they'll get it in bunches. You pick out one o' them that takes your fancy. Me I got a bead on my ch'ice."

He leaped up, grasped the framed motto and in his sock feet stepped across the room toward the laughing, jeering group at the other table. As he did so the bartender, Biff Ludy, reached beneath the bar and, grabbing a bungstarter, came out into the room, toward the table where Flatfoot Hawkins still sat.

"You're name's Meek. You live up to it. If there's war, she's private," admonished the bartender waggling the bungstarter suggestively.

"Ah. Quiet's right," Flatfoot whined, shrinking back from him in apparent terror.

* * *

"YOU men started something. Now you set there and watch how Butch finishes it." He half turned to watch the other table. Old Bill Stevens, bearing the framed exhortation to meekness had stopped behind Butch Ludy's chair.

"You was remarkin'?" he suggested, politely, holding the motto in both hands, on his face a patient smile. "You was talkin' of sunsets and—"

"Look at it, boys." Butch Ludy turned his chair round. "The only original hand-painted carpet vest this side o'—"

He got no farther. The little, wiry gray-haired rooster of a man before him leaped into the air. Before his feet touched the ground again he had tapped his heels together three times, a sign of agility that escaped the surprized Butch Ludy.

"W-o-w-e-e," screamed old Bill Stevens, in a voice that shamed the timber wolves of his northern bush. His feet touched the floor lightly, then left it as he leaped forward. His arm came down swiftly. There was a crash of splintering glass, and then, Mr. Butch Ludy, his face scratched in a dozen places, was wearing, like a collar, the frame of that motto of peace and good will.

"There, durn ye. 'Blessed is the Meek.' " cried old Bill Stevens thoughtfully hooking the chair from under one of Butch's henchmen with his foot. "C'mon, Flatfoot, what you sleepin' there for? Two down and three up, pardner. Want me to hog the fun, you slow-witted bloke?"

He dodged a wild kick from Butch Ludy as the big man sprang out of his chair, both hands wrenching at the frame around his throat.

"*You're* dressed proper for the party, you are, but the new picter don't improve the frame none," Bill comforted him, then struck him, amidships, hard. "Out o' my way," he cried, leaping past the staggering Butch, "I got a date with the wall, for I don't crave no snakes behind me."

"You set still." The bartender seeing that the scrap was turning out seriously for Butch increased his vigilance. If the big stranger could put up as good a scrap as the smaller one he, the barkeep would render acceptable service to the Ludy cause by holding Flatfoot out of action while the gang cleaned up Bill Stevens.

"I'm settin'," Flatfoot responded meekly. "No use attackin' till our rear is safe," he thought, remembering a bit of tactics. "Lumme, now for it." Flatfoot watched as Butch Ludy's companions, the first surprize over, started to close in on old Bill. He even took time out to grin when the old man, grabbing a chair, fended off their first furious assault, his back to the wall, the chair-legs jabbing in front of him.

"Knows his duty, he does, and never learned it in the bush," decided Flatfoot. "For country folks he works prime. Now for this here detached army corps with the bungstarter that's clutterin' our rear."

"You stop stirrin' or I'll bean you," the bartender threatened. "I *been* settin' steady," Flatfoot responded. "*I* don't want no messy fights, bless you; I'm pleasant mannered, I am—but," his foot came up swiftly, the heavy toe of his boot meeting the bartender's knee-cap. "But I'm goin' visiting, chum." Flatfoot leaped sidewise as the bartender fell. "You lie still and rub that there knee," he advised, and sprang toward the stove in the corner.

* * *

"THE poker, Flatfoot, the poker." Old Bill, busy with his own scrapping, still had time to boss the job and his partner.

"Pokers and murders," Flatfoot grinned. "Like ——, chum." He grabbed a worn broom stub. His hands slid down the smooth handle of hardwood. He whirled about, pressing the stub of straw against his thigh, the handle projecting outward and upward before him as he came swiftly back.

"Fix baynits," roared ex-corporal Hawkins of the Grenadiers. "Up Guards and at 'em."

The barkeeper, clinging to the table, drew himself erect on his good leg. He was game. As Flatfoot came by he pushed himself over, toppled across the big Englishman's path, the bungstarter swinging wildly.

"Give 'im the butt." Flatfoot by some legerdemain reversed the broom, sidestepped, brought the stub of straw, hard as a board, up under the barkeeper's bristly chin and, putting his six feet of trained brawn behind the impromptu weapon fairly lifted Bill Ludy back on to his feet.

"Takes seven years to make a Guardsman," crowed Flatfoot Hawkins. "There's only a few of us left. You're lookin' at one o' us now."

But the bartender wasn't looking at anything.

"Long point advancin'." Flatfoot Hawkins stepped swiftly on his way, and, one foot well advanced to the front, lunged at Butch Ludy's back.

"Thank ye, Flatfoot old scout. He was pesterin' me a mite." Bill Stevens, peeping round the bottom of his chair and shield saw Butch stagger away, one hand clasped over his kidneys, his face twisted with pain.

"An' a jab. Very useful close in." Flatfoot slid both hands up the broom handle as two of Butch's henchmen turned to meet him. One of them swallowed two inches of hardwood and spat blood as Flatfoot drew his broom handle back again. The other, getting in one light blow, got no more comfort out of subsequent proceedings for—

"And now we'll act civilian and use our hands," cried Flatfoot Hawkins, dropping his broom and crossing a swift left to his last assailant's jaw. "Come out from behind that there wooden parapet, Bill Stevens and do a bit of fighting in no-man's land. I'm no hog, neither, and you're missing the best of it, hived up like that."

"Ye danged cantankerous cuss." Bill dropped the chair and tackled the last of his assailants. "Spoilin' a good fight so quick. No, stranger, I won't exactly kill ye, and no need to run away, specially when you ain't goin' nowheres yet."

As the last of the gang backed toward the door old Bill leaped after him, twined crooked legs about him, and bore him over.

"Wood on wood," Bill exclaimed, thumping his victim's head against the boards.

"Snap out of it. Snap out of it." Flatfoot dragged his partner away from his prey. "You —— murderin' little rascal. Armistice has come. Look at 'em. Prime job we've made, us Meeks."

Grumbling, Bill Stevens desisted; cast a glance over the room. The victims of Flatfoot's improvised bayonet had no fight left in them. The barkeep slumped against the table, half sitting, half lying, rubbing his jaw. Already a rash was springing out on his chin where the stiff broom straw had caught him. His head was spinning still. His brother, Butch Ludy, was more active. One hand clapped against his back where the "long point" had caught him, he was running around the room in circles like a pup with a sore paw, howling as he ran.

Whenever he passed a fallen comrade he kicked him. It relieved his feelings.

The man Flatfoot had jabbed in the mouth was trying to fit a broken tooth back into place, his face one silly dazed grin.

"As for the rest of the scum." Flatfoot watched the two others as they cowered where they had fallen. "C'mon. I'm sick o' makin' Meeks out o' fightin' men."

"Wait a minute—wait a minute till I get my boots." Old Bill stepped across and retrieved his footgear. Then he stripped off the gorgeous vest—in ribbons now. As Butch Ludy, on his circuit, came by, old Bill tripped him skilfully, and tossed the vest to him as he lay groaning on the floor. "Clap her on hind side to," he advised. "It'll take the pain out better'n a mustard plaster."

Then together the two partners sought the train for End of Steel.

"And now—" Flatfoot watched the country flying by the car window—"now that this here bank holiday's near over maybe you won't spoil the rest of it with sermons. Me take offense! Me touchy! Who wore the invitation to fight on his chest? Who mixed it with them pub-lice—"

"Sermons," snorted old Bill Stevens. "You get this straight, Flatfoot Hawkins. When I speak I says more than words. Taking offense has its place at times and that I'll admit free and open. But giving offense ain't right, any time. And you—you give enough offense to start the town of Colby north after us."

"And how?" asked Flatfoot Hawkins argumentatively. "And how, Bill Stevens?"

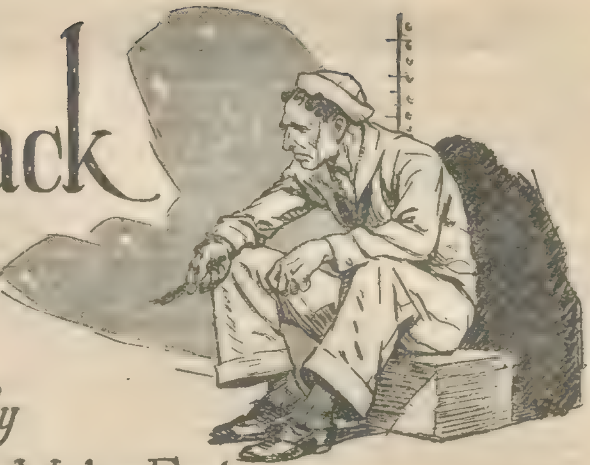
Bill glowered at the landscape where a few traces of civilization still appeared.

"Would he take an old man's advice, this Flatfoot Hawkins? No sir. Would he bend a poker over the heads of them fighting men? Not him. It's a domestic female broom he must use, this bold and bloody man. He lays them out, the Ludy fambly, and their tough friends, with a broom. Why, you pink-struck Englisher, have you no pity for 'em? Them with repytations to keep up as fightin' men? You've shamed them folks in their home town. What's worse, if they've got wives there's no telling where 't will end. It's bad enough to hear of females tending bar. If they starts baynit fightin' with broomsticks where's a man goin' to hide out on them."

"That's gratitude," Flatfoot complained.

"There's no gratitude in Colby, I'm tellin' you," Bill said. "If you'd only hit them friendly and man-fashioned with the poker!"

Cash Jack



By
Charles Victor Fischer

Author of "The Corruption of Deacon Munden," "Frog," etc.

HE SAT on a chest, on the topside of the big scout cruiser *Rolling Lou*, one sultry afternoon down in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. He was short, wiry. Sitting there, hunched over, he looked smaller than he really was. He was munching a smoked herring. The point of his little curved nose moved up and down with his jaws. It was a thin, sallow face. His eyes—they were small, brown, and full of shrewdness—darted from side to side furtively, and in them glinted a blend of hope and anxiety.

"Herring," they called him. This was his office hour. That chest might just as well have displayed three gilded balls from a stanchion or post; for such it was known to be by every bluejacket on board—a loan office. To that chest they came, between four and five every afternoon, and negotiated for their loans; stated the amount, agreed upon rate of interest, etc., etc. Then later, after satisfying himself as to character, general standing and trustworthiness of the applicants, Herring would hand over the cash. The transfer of money didn't, of course, take place there, at the chest, but in some remote, unfrequented part of the ship. For Naval Blue Laws prohibit borrowing and lending, even down to a pair of socks; and Herring took no chances.

Herring didn't believe in taking chances. He played everything safe. That was why he hadn't enlisted in the Navy till after the Armistice was signed. And yet, on the face of it, he did take chances. He lent out money without security. You might call it bad business. It was good business.

Herring's pay-me-back rate fluctuated between six and nine for five. For three days following a pay day, when most of his shipmates had money, he lent out at the rate of six for five; from the third to the seventh day after pay day, seven for five; from then till next pay day, eight for five—or, if the demand happened to be heavy, owing to a flutter of misfortune such as a lost boat race or ball game, when all the sportsmen would be "flat," nine for five. He had been known to squeeze two for one out of one lad—a lad who'd had to get home at once, owing to illness in his family.

But Herring *could* play ball. He was a whirlwind on second base—when he wanted to be a whirlwind; that is, when he had no money up on the other team. This, however, had never been proved against him. There was no way of proving it; no way of catching him; he was too slippery, foxy.

Now the worried look in Herring's shifty little eyes that afternoon had nothing to do with baseball; nor yet with the fact that business was poor. Business was always at a slump during the winter months when the *Lou* was in Cuba with the fleet, for the reason that there was no place at Guantanamo Bay where the gobs could spend their money—unless they gambled it away. He expected and duly calculated on that; during those months he pushed out in other lines of enterprise, scrubbing clothes, bags and hammocks, mending clothes, cutting hair. No; the cause of Herring's anxiety that afternoon was a tall, slim chief yeoman, Jack Nelson, who, a short distance forward of Herring's chest, or office, stood in the midst of a group of gobs writing names and amounts in a notebook.

Nelson was taking up a collection for the family of a departed shipmate; a lad named "Ducey" Summers, who had died only a week before. He went about decks from gob to gob, writing down their names and amounts, to be collected pay day. Herring watched him, as a hawk watches, for Nelson was headed his way. He finished munching his smoked herring, swallowed the tail, wiped his face and hands in his hat, and then stooped over and out of a spit-kit snared him the butt of a cigaret, which some extravagant shipmate had thrown away half-smoked. He sponged a match from a passerby. But ere he could light up, out of the corner of an eye he saw the tall form of Nelson approaching. Herring was up and away like a rabbit.

"Hey, Herring!" Nelson had a good voice.

Herring halted. His narrow shoulders drooped and his jaw hung low.

"Wha'd'yuh want?" he growled.

"Why—" Notebook in hand, Nelson swooped down upon him with a breezy stride. "What'll I put you down for? It's for Ducey's people."

Herring glared hatefully at the notebook. There was pain, too, in that look.

"Well?" Nelson had already written down his name. "You know, Herring, we want to do the best we can on this. Ducey's mother is a widow, with two little girls. They're poor. Ducey was their only support. It's up to us to help them strong. How much?"

Nelson erred in that he thought Herring might have a speck of humanness in him.

"Tell yuh, chief," Herring replied, "not that I give a —— fo' the money. 'Notheh thing, I don't like to talk about a man's business, special after a man's dead. But Ducey owed me seven dollahs cash jack that I neveh got. Two weeks before he died I give him five. He promised me seven back pay day. Then he died."

Nelson looked at him as one might look at an apparition.

"Say—" His tone was intensely sympathetic "—that—was—too—bad."

"Not that I'm kickin'," Herring added. "It ain't the money."

"Certainly not. What's a few dollars to the richest man on the ship?"

"Richest man? Me?" Herring grinned and shook his head. "Yuh got me wrong. chief. I ain't so rich."

"I know, I know, Herring." Ruefully Nelson eyed Herring's patched jumper and trousers, and the piece of wrapping-string doing service as a shoe-lace. "You're a poor man. But a dollar or so won't break you. You know, your own people might be in need some day."

Herring grinned again.

"No they won't, because I ain't got no people."

"No? Tough. But say, how about it? How much?"

"I tell yuh, chief, Ducey owed me seven dollahs cash jack before he died! I don't think that undeh those conditions I oughta donate. I figger I already donated. Don't I lose my five, besides the two dollars interest?"

Nelson pushed back his cap, exposing a forehead that was spacious and smooth, but that quickly became creased, as his thoughtful blue eyes focused in an up and down scrutiny of the prodigy of lavishness before him.

"HERRING," he said slowly, "you've been lending out money on this ship for two years, at rates of interest up to about two thousand per cent."

"Now wait a minute, chief!" Herring blurted in defense. "That's what yuh'se all think, that I'm makin' a million! Yuh'se don't stop to figger. How about it when a fellah slips oveh the gangway with some o' my cash jack an' neveh shows up again?"

"How many?"

"There was two. Owed me ten dollahs each. An' then Ducey—"

"That's twenty-five dollars. And you've cleaned up about five thousand."

"Now wait a minute, chief! You're off again! How about the cash jack it costs me to keep the jimmy-legs blind? Do yuh think 'Catfoot's' lettin' me get away with all this stuff fo' nothin'? It's just like the fellah that puts hootch oveh the bar fo' fifty cents a jolt. He makes big profit, sure! But look what it costs him to keep the cops blind."

It was only a waste of time, so Nelson turned away.

"Herring," he flung back, "if what the sky-pilots say is true, your soul is due for a —— of a long sizzling some day!"

Nelson's parting words stuck in Herring's crop. They stirred his curiosity. It was that word *soul* that puzzled him. What was soul? And why—if souls must sizzle—why pick on *his* soul? Not that it worried him any. He was too happy just then to worry. A dollar saved was a dollar earned. He returned to his chest, unlocked it, lifted the lid and drew forth another smoked herring.

He sat there munching methodically, taking small bites of the delectable flesh and masticating it thoroughly, chewing it over and over, bones and all, so as to make it last a long time, the while with his ferret-eyes he quested the deck for suckers. He was not long questing. Came along one Billy Shaw, a short, stocky, bow-legged youngster, with blond hair and happy-go-lucky blue eyes.

Shaw and Herring were sort of sidekicks. Herring played second base on the *Lou's* baseball team, and Shaw played shortstop.

"Hello, Herring," he greeted, and sat down on the chest.

"How much do yuh want?" Herring anticipated him. Then he broke off:

"Say, Billy, what the —— is a fellah's soul? I know what the soles o' my shoes are. But what does a man mean when he says a fellah's soul is gonna sizzle?"

"Huh," Shaw grunted and grinned. He pondered a moment; then: "Tell yuh, Herring, soul-stuff is too deep for me. "Deacon" Munden could give you the straight dope on it."

"Aw, the —— with that —— fool," Herring growled. "I don't talk to him."

"Why, Deac's a good kid, Herring. He's the one that started the drive for Ducey's mother and sisters."

So much the worse for Deacon Munden, so far as Herring's opinion went.

"I thought so," he muttered contemptuously. "He's always makin' grandstand plays like that. But what's a fellah's soul like, anyway?"

"Say—" Billy laughed. "I asked my stepmother that one time and got clouted. She didn't wallop me because I asked the question, but because she couldn't answer it. All I know is that your soul is something you carry around with you all the time. It's something separate from your body; you can't see it, or feel it—but it's there all the time."

"Inside o' yuh?"

"Sure."

"But yuh can't feel it?"

"No."

Herring grinned broadly.

"Then who in —— cares if his soul sizzles —if he can't feel it? How much do yuh want? Seven fo' five today. You' just in time. Tomorrow it'll be eight fo' five."

"Why—" Shaw cast a wary look about. Then in a half whisper: "First I want to talk to you about this Saturday's game with the *Minnie*. Think we're goin' to win it?"

Herring eyed him sagely, and took another bite of his fish.

"The reason I ask you is this," Shaw went on: "There's suspicion aboard that you threw last Saturday's game against the Marines. They think some of that Marine money was yours."

"What the —— good is it doin' 'em to think, if they can't prove nothin'?"

"No-o-o," Shaw pronounced slowly. "But I know, and you know I know, playin' right alongside of you, that some of the bulls you pulled in that game were raw. In the fourth inning you dropped the ball after I all but *handed it to you*, and messed a double play. Twice you threw the ball so far over Burlick's head that he couldn't 've reached it with a butterfly net. You fanned four times. You—"

"What's that got to say about it!" Herring flared up. "Go up to New Yawk, any day, an' look at a big league ball game! You'll see the best playehs in the business pullin' boneheads!"

"That's right," Shaw had to concede. "But it didn't look to me last Saturday as if you were playin' your game."

"Just an off day, that's all. How much do yuh want?"

"Why—thought I'd bet twenty-five on this Saturday's game with the *Minnie*. But I can't see seven for five. If I won, I'd only be fifteen to the good. I'd owe you thirty-five out of the fifty. That's the same as giving odds of two to one. Wouldn't mind if it was a sure thing."

Herring fixed him with his shrewd little eyes.

"Billy, did yuh eveh stop to consideh that everything can be made a sure thing?"

Shaw waited.

"All a man needs to get the cash jack in this woild is brains," Herring added.

"No doubt," Shaw assented. "But I don't grasp."

Herring swallowed the tail of his fish.

"We'll talk about that some otheh time," he dismissed the subject. "See me tomorrow. Maybe I'll let yuh have that twenty-five as a loweh rate. Give 's a cigaret."

Early that evening Nelson and the two other members of the committee taking up the collection for Ducey's mother and sisters, Deacon Munden and "Snapper" Lesner, met in the pay-office. They sat closely grouped at a large desk. Deacon, who was a yeoman first-class and worked in the pay-office, had a complete list of the ship's company. Checking off on this from their three lists, they found that they had the name of every member of the crew but one—Herring. The amounts of their three lists totaled eight hundred dollars.

"The officers 'll bring it up to a thousand," said Snapper. He was a quartermaster third-class; short and fat, pug-nosed and freckled and red-headed.

"Easily," Nelson replied, in an absent tone, and with a far-away stare in his eyes.

"I can't understand the nature of that shylock," observed Deacon, a faint smile on his serious, fine-featured face. "I can't get on the inside of his mind. His scheme of life, his motives, principles, what he gets out of life—he's over my head!"

Snapper grunted. The far-away look left Nelson's eyes; he laughed.

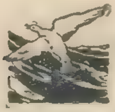
"Understand him! You were brought up in a different world, Deac."

"That's it. And that's why I feel sorry for him."

"Sorry!" from Snapper.

"Yes," Deacon answered. "He can't help it. He's so made. He's one of those unfortunate human strays. A victim of circumstance and environment. He never had a fair chance. He was born in ignorance and kept in ignorance."

"Oh, say—" Nelson grinned and scowled. "Born ignorant! Who wasn't? Do you mean to tell me he never learned the difference between right and wrong? Nix, Deac, nix. You're aces up, old-timer. I've got oodles of respect for your principles and ideals. But you're plumb off when you say that bird is ignorant. He's rotten!"



"THERE wasn't much ignorance about that ball game he played last Saturday against the Marines," stated Snapper. "If he didn't throw that game my eyes ain't mates!"

"You said it, sailor, you said it," Nelson put in. "Nobody could tell me that some of the money that Marine brought over from the Point wasn't Herring's."

"Why, sure! Clear as air!" Snapper glared viciously. "He lost the game. We lost over three thousand dollars. And if the truth could be got at, I'd bet a year's pay to a nickel that at least a thousand of that is in Herring's money-belt!"

"If," Nelson grinned. "But prove it. Tell you: The way to fix a rat like him is to make one of his rotten stunts hit right back at himself. That's the cure. If the brute-natured skunk that digs spurs into a horse could be made to feel every dig himself—he'd —— soon quit diggin' at the poor nag."

"You said it, chief," Snapper took it up. "You know, Deac, it's all right talkin' that love-thy-neighbor stuff. But you go tryin' to love Herring and you'll get your pocket picked. All I got to say is, watch him this Saturday when we play the *Minnie*."

"Oh, he'll play his game this Saturday," Nelson said, "because there won't be much money up. Nobody's breaking their necks to get their money up. That last game—"

He stopped. For a few minutes he was silent, thoughtful.

"Say," he broke out finally, "who's manager of the *Minnie's* team?"

"Fellow named Tom Darcey," Snapper answered.

"Tom Darcey! Fellow used to pull stroke-oar in the old *Ohio's* race-boat?"

"Um-m-m—I think so."

Nelson sat up and looked at his watch. It was six thirty. For a few minutes he sat staring at the desk-top. Finally he arose and, without a word, went out.

Snapper scratched his head and grinned at Deac.

"Whatever got into that bird?"

"Why," Deacon smiled, "he suddenly remembered that he had somewhere to go."

That didn't quite satisfy Snapper's curiosity. He went out and nosed up Nelson's trail. He saw the tall chief go aft to the quarter-deck, secure permission to leave the ship, and then go down the gangway and embark in the *Lou's* steam launch, which was conveying visitors to other ships of the fleet.

It was eight-thirty when Nelson returned aboard. He proceeded straight to the pay-office, where he found Deacon.

"Deacon," Nelson went to the point, "how much money have you got?"

Deac looked up from the letter he was writing and smiled.

"In cash? I've got just what the boys of the fleet gave me for winning over the Cuban in that fight, Nelson—four thousand dollars. Besides that I've got two years' pay on the books."

"Will you lend me the four thousand for a couple of days?"

Deacon sobered. Then he smiled again and answered—

"Yes."

"I want to do some good with it," Nelson added. "All I can offer you in the way of security is my word."

"That's enough, Nelson." With which Deacon arose and went out.

He returned in a few minutes with the paymaster, who opened the safe and took out Deac's huge homeward-bound roll. Deac took it and handed it to Nelson.

"This is none of my affair," the paymaster said. "I presume, Nelson, that you know what you're going to do with that. But if I were you I wouldn't let it be known that I had it."

"It's all right, sir," Nelson assured him. "This is for a big cause."

And without further explanation the tall chief slipped out. He then went ambling about the decks till he found Billy Shaw, the *Lou's* shortstop. They leaned over the top-side rail and talked baseball, till some time after "taps."

That confab between Nelson and Shaw didn't escape Herring's shrewd, observant eyes. It set him guessing; for Nelson and Shaw, he knew, were none too close as shipmates. He said nothing to Shaw, however, till the afternoon of the next day, Friday, when Billy came as on the day before and sat down on his chest.

"What are you goin' to tax me on that twenty-five?" Shaw began.

Herring ignored the question

"I see you an' King Dodo with you' heads togetheh last night," he observed naively.

"Who?" Shaw reflected. "Oh, Nelson? That's right, we did have a talk."

"What was 'e sayin'? Somethin' about me? 'Cause I wouldn't donate fo' Ducey's people, hey?"

"No," Shaw answered, "it wasn't about that. We were chewin' the sock about tomorrow's game with the *Minnie*. Say, know what? Nelson's got four thousand bubbles to bet on that game. No kiddin'! I tell you, he showed it to me!"

Herring studied him for a moment, a sour, sardonic grin on his thin, sallow face.

"Say," he jeered, "don't you let that guy hand that stuff over on yuh. Faw thousand dollahs! Nelson wouldn't have that much cash jack if he lived a hund'ed yeahs!" He laughed.

"Faw thousand dollahs! A —— fool like him? He spends every nickel he gets fo' civilian clothes! Watch him, any time the ship is in New Yawk. As soon as he hits the beach he's all dressed up like a million dollahs, runnin' around with a lot o' swells. Faw thousand—"

"He *showed* it to me!"

Herring sobered.

"It couldn't be his."

"Maybe not. But he's got it, an' he's goin' to bet it on tomorrow's game. At least he's thinkin' about it. He asked me if I thought every man on the team is straight."

Herring became all eagerness.

"Wha'd'yuh tell 'im?"

"Why—I told him if there was a crook on the team he was over *my* head."

Herring's little eyes blinked and his little nose curved downward in a pleased smile. He slapped Shaw on the back.

"That was a —— good anseh, Billy."

A short silence. Herring was buried in thought.

"Say," he broke out, "that faw thousand couldn't be the cash jack they collected fo' Ducey's people, could it?"

"No. They only got about eight hundred from the crew and two hundred from the officers—a thousand in all. And nearly all that's to be collected pay day."

"Give 's a cigaret."

"What rate on that twenty-five?" Shaw asked again.

He got no reply. Herring's mind was wrapped not in dollars but in thousands of dollars.

"Billy," he said finally, "do yuh happen to know any gobs on the *Minnie?* Do yuh know any one on that packet that a fellah could trust?—a fellah that could pull a little stunt an' keep his trap shut about it, fo' some cash jack easy money?"

"Yes," Shaw answered. "I've got a cousin on the *Minnie.* Jimmy Quinn, a bosun's mate first-class. You've seen him. He plays third base on their team.

Herring turned on him quickly and put a hand on his shoulder.

"He's you' cousin?"

"Sure."

"Is 'e all right?—that's the big idea."

"I'd trust him."

"Listen." Herring looked about, saw no one within hearing, and then, in a half whisper, went on:

"Do you an' you' cousin wanna make some cash jack?"

"Shoot."

"Yuh won't put up a yell, if the proposition don't suit you?"

"Shoot, I said! I'm no squealer! If I don't like the looks of your proposition I'll say *no*, and that'll settle it!"

A moment longer Herring hesitated; then:

"Yuh say Nelson's got faw thousand to bet on tomorrow's game. All right. I got faw thousand to cover him."

He stopped, eying Shaw tentatively.

"Shoot!" snapped Shaw.

"But I can't put up the jack myself," Herring went on. "They'd hang me to the yahd-ahm if they caught me bettin' against the team I'm playin' on! The jack's got to come from over on the *Minnie.*"

"I got you. Someone over there has to bring it over and cover Nelson's. And then?"

"THEN all you an' me has to do is throw the game. It's easy, Billy! You on shawt an' me on second. Nothin' to it. Did yuh eveh stop to consideh that you an' me is the whole team? Without us they couldn't play mahbles!"

Herring's little eyes were sparkling like jewels.

"Wha'd'yuh say?" he persisted. "I'll give you an' you' cousin twenty-fi' dollahs cash jack each."

"Twenty-five! And you clean' up four thousand?"

"Take it easy! take it ea-ea-easy!" Herring remonstrated. "Want the whole ship to know it? I'm takin' all the chance, ain't I? It's all my cash jack goin' up. You'se ain't riskin' nothin'! Make it thi'ty dollahs each."

Shaw stretched out his arms, yawned, and then stood up.

"Herring," he said, "you've sure got a thick crust."

"How much do yuh'se want?"

"Tell you, Herring—" Billy sat down again—"I'll make you a sportin' proposition. Give my cousin and me five per cent. of your total winning. That's two hundred bubbles."

Herring's expression was truly pathetic.

"Cash jack in advance?"

"No. After you collect."

"Billy—" Herring shook his head slowly, sadly—"that's squeezin' the haht's blood out of a man." He sighed. "Oh well I guess I'll have to. It's a go. Two hund'ed dollahs—after I collect."

That evening after supper Billy Shaw responded to the call, "Lay aft, all the visiting party!" and embarked in the *Rolling Lou's* motor-sailer. He took Herring's four thousand over to the battle-ship *Minnie.*

His cousin, Jimmy Quinn, a boatswain's mate first-class, and third baseman on the *Minnie's* baseball team, met him at the gangway. Quinn was a short, bulldog type of an old tar, much battered and weather-beaten.

They went forward to the *Minnie's* carpenter shop. There, after a quiet, earnest talk, Shaw counted out and handed over Herring's four thousand dollars to Quinn.

They separated then. Shaw went shambling about the battleship's decks, taking in the ship, looking up old shipmates—killing time. Quinn went aft and secured permission to leave the ship. He embarked in one of the *Minnie's* steam launches, and brought Herring's four thousand dollars back over to the *Rolling Lou.*

Coming up over the *Lou's* gangway, Quinn saluted the officer of the deck and requested permission to visit the ship. He received a pleasant "very well."

He walked forward, after the casual, aimless manner of one just sight-seeing. But not for long. For close at his heels trailed Herring, his ferret-eyes watching his chance. Shortly Quinn entered an empty compartment on the gun-deck. There Herring buttonholed him.

"You' lookin' fo' the fellah with the faw thousand to bet?"

Quinn nodded.

"Where is 'e?"

Herring cast a quick, furtive look about, and whispered hurriedly:

"In the pay-office. Nelson is his name. Say, whateveh yuh do, do it nice! Just folleh me. I'll make an excuse to go in theah."

Herring didn't purpose letting that money out of his sight for any longer than he had to. That four thousand dollars was very nearly his *all*. It had taken him two years to squeeze that out of his shipmates, and he was takin no chances. He crossed the deck and then walked forward to the pay-office, with Quinn close behind him.

"Wait till I'm inside a minute," Herring whispered, halting at the door. "It wouldn't look good, the both of us goin' in at once."

Quinn grunted and passed on forward. Herring knocked and got the "come in."

There were two in the pay-office—Nelson and Snapper.

"I wanna find out somethin' about my pay-accounts," Herring excused himself. "They had me balled up last pay day."

"You'll have to wait till Deac Munden gets back," Nelson replied. "Sit down."

Just what Herring wanted. Now he could witness the bet being made, the putting up of the cash jack. What he saw, he *knew*. He could trust his own eyes, but not other peoples' tongues.

In a few minutes Quinn entered.

"Hello, Snapper!" he greeted in surprize. "How long you been on this packet?"

This made it nice, thought Herring, as the two shook hands. It sort of smoothed the way, Snapper and Quinn being old shipmates.

After introductions, Quinn went to the point.

"Say," he said, "I've got four thousand da-das in my sock—*Minnie* money. We think we're gonna trim you birds tomorrow. How about gettin' it covered?"

Nelson came up out of his chair.

""Put your jack *right down there*, sailor!" He smote the desk with the palm of his hand. "You needn't walk another inch! You're covered!"

Each counted out his four thousand dollars on the deck. They agreed upon Snapper as stakeholder.

"All right, sailors," Snapper consented, and began straightening and smoothing the eight thousand dollars into one stack. "But believe me I ain't goin' to hold this in my fins! I'm goin' aft and give it to the paymaster. It belongs in the safe!"

Here was Herring's chance for a getaway.

"If the paymasteh's comin' in I betteh get out," he said. "He'll tell me this ain't no hangout. I'll see Deacon about my accounts in the mawning."

At a safe distance Herring followed Snapper aft to the paymaster's stateroom. Then, assured that his money was safe, he went up to his chest on the top-side, took out a smoked herring and sat down to munch and dream.

Eight thousand dollars! Two thousand more—and this would come quickly, with such a solid block of capital behind him—one good nine-for-five day would do it. And then, oh then! Fulfilment. The materialization of his great dream.

Herring's great dream weighed two hundred pounds. Her name was Rosie and she lived in Brooklyn. She was not so pretty of face, but ah!—so deliciously fat and soft. So like unto a jelly-fish. And Herring was keen for fat ones. Rosie was his ideal of exquisite, sensitive feminine loveliness. His whole being and becoming was wrapped in the flabby, quivering fat of her. It's the the old, old story. She fired, inspired him; evoked in him the resolve to conquer, achieve.

And to possess her he *must* achieve. For Rosie was not so fat and soft mentally. She was a woman merely and only, but not a fool. She was not to be had for the mere asking; nor yet won by promises. Not Rosie. Her mind dealt with solid, concrete quantities, not with idle, visionary abstractions. She reasoned in round numbers. She computed her worth at fifty dollars a pound—times two hundred, equal ten thousand. And not until he could show her a ten-thousand-dollar bank account would she marry him.

Thus had Herring come in the Navy. Rosie had cited him to a youngster named Joe, Herring's bitterest rival, who had been in the Navy and come out with several thousand dollars, made by lending out money at rates of six, seven, eight, nine and ten for five. This Joe now had a flourishing business, a combination pool room, gambling-house and blind tiger. He, Herring, should go forth and do likewise.

Herring calculated. Tomorrow's game would swell the contents of his money-belt to eight thousand dollars. In another week the ship would go north, to New York, perhaps. A heavy stream of "let's takes" always came at him in New York. Five thousand dollars lent out at seven for five would do it, would put him over the ten-thousand-dollar mark.

As "Tattoo" sounded on the bugle, Herring was asking himself the question—

"Shall I buy my discharge, or work a kick-out?"

"Taps." He swallowed the tail of his herring, and then went below and turned in.

THAT game of ball between the *Lou* and the *Minnie* should echo down through the ages. It was a modern classic. Ten thousand gobs sat there in the bleaching sun and wondered what it was all about.

The fun began in the fourth inning, when Herring made a stop of a batted ball that was truly sensational. It was one of those smokers, the ball came down between first and second with the speed of a bullet. Herring scooped it up on a dead run with one hand. The crowd burst forth in wild applause—but hushed to dead silence the next moment, for Herring threw the ball ten feet over the first baseman's head. The *Minnie* runner rounded first base, and was well on his way to the second by the time the first baseman recovered the ball. He had plenty of time to make it; but he fell, nearing the base, and was tagged out by Billy Shaw.

Herring thought nothing of that. It looked like an accident, that *Minnie* player's falling. Anyhow, there was only one out, and the *Minnie's* heavy hitters were coming up. They should score in this inning. They would—if he got opportunity to help them.

He got that opportunity. But not till after the *Lou's* pitcher had walked the next two batters. Then down toward Herring came a slow grounder. With *Minnie* men on first and second bases, it looked like an easy double play. Herring stepped up to meet it, stopped—and then let it go through his legs. But then—of all the jackasses!—Billy Shaw messed things. He came galloping over from short, behind Herring, scooped up the ball that had shot through Herring's legs, stopped, turned and made a perfect throw to third. The *Lou's* third baseman took the ball on the bag, and then shot it to first, making a beautiful double play and three out.

Herring stood there dazed. He didn't hear the mob's roaring applause. His eyes were on Billy Shaw, walking across the diamond towards the player's bench. The voice of the *Minnie's* second baseman, coming out, roused him.

"Snappy stuff, that."

Herring made him no reply. He walked slowly in. The germ of suspicion had sprouted in his fertile brain. Why had Shaw made that clean-cut play? Why hadn't he thrown the ball to third wide, or over the baseman's head? Was Shaw handing him the double-cross?

But he got no opportunity to speak to Shaw between innings. Instead of sitting down on the bench, Shaw walked over and took his place on the coaching line behind third base. Watching him from the bench, Herring noted that his little fellow conspirator talked in a joking manner to Quinn, who covered third for the *Minnie.* They were chuckling over something. Once they both looked toward the *Lou's* bench. Herring tried hard to petrify them with a glare of his eyes.

Herring came up to bat in that inning, with the bases full and two out. He fanned.

Walking across the diamond to take the field, he fell in with Shaw.

"What was the idear, makin' a play like that?" he questioned. "You kep' 'em from scorin'."

"Say—" and Billy's eyes were wide with sincerity—"I couldn't help it. I just didn't think in that moment."

"Yuh *wanna* think!"

"Aw, cheer up, Herring. No score yet. Five innings to go."

Herring was reassured. With Billy Shaw playing the phenomenal game he was capable of, the *Lou* stood a good chance of winning. Besides Shaw and himself, the *Lou's* team didn't amount to much. The outfield was weak, the battery mediocre.

"How about you' cousin, Quinn? We can depend on him?"

"Just watch him," Shaw answered. "He bats this inning. And say, play *close in*, when he comes up."

They did that, Herring and Shaw—played close in. Quinn was the first *Minnie* batter up. And true to the dope he punched out a neat single over second base.

Then on the next pitched ball, Quinn scooted for second. Herring took the catcher's throw. He had plenty time to tag Quinn. But he dropped the ball.

He now had an opportunity to talk to Quinn.

"Don't fo'get, old timeh," he whispered, "the's two hund'ed dollahs cash jack fo' you an' Billy if you guys win. I'm helpin' yuh'se all I can."

"Got yuh, sailor," Quinn grunted. And then, as the pitcher delivered the ball, he started for third.

It didn't look to Herring as if Quinn tried very hard for that bag. He was out, by a good ten feet. The next two *Minnie* batters fanned. And the *way* they fanned! They swung at high balls, low balls, wide balls—at balls they couldn't have reached with bats six feet long! Their bats didn't come within a yard of the ball! Herring was worried again.

But the *Lou's* team failed to score in their half of the inning, and he walked back out to second base in the sixth with a do-or-die set to his jaw. He would force the *Minnie* to score in this inning.

And indeed he did all that mortal man could do. He dropped a pop fly, fumbled a grounder and booted another, filling the bases.

The crowd began to jeer "Boo-oo-oo!" at him. As if he cared. He cared no more for their jeers than he did for their slaps on the back. Neither jeers nor slaps on the back brought him any dollars.

The bases were full. None out. A good *Minnie* batter was up. It looked good to Herring.

Spat. The *Lou's* pitcher had shot the ball to third. That *Minnie* runner was caught a dozen feet off the bag. But worse! Here came Billy Shaw on a dead gallop for second. Like a bullet the ball came down to him from third base. The throw was high, but Shaw leaped, speared it with one hand and put it on that runner, making two out. On top of that the *Minnie* batter proceeded to make three wild swipes at the air.

That settled all doubt in Herring's mind. Quinn and Shaw had double-crossed him. But that was the least of it. Every man on the *Minnie's* team was playing to lose, throwing the game to the *Lou!* He had been sold out!

Never was a dog sicker than Herring was in those moments. All his beloved cash jack was gone. And so all-of-a-sudden! He sat there on the bench, hunched over, limp as a shoe-string, his eyes glazed and his thin face yellow with despair. And how the mob giggled and "boo-ood" at him. Once he looked up toward the grandstand and saw Nelson, serene and smiling.

There was the brain that had engineered this tragedy! Came back to Herring now Nelson's leaving the ship, two evenings before. He had seen Nelson go—and return. It was clear as spring water! Nelson had gone over to the *Minnie* and had put the manager of that team up to throw the game. That was it. And then later, that same evening, Nelson and Shaw with their heads together at the *Lou's* topsail rail—

Herring was dizzy. He saw five Billy Shaws walk out and pick up bats.

Crack. Shaw met the first ball pitched on the nose. Away it soared—away and away, while Billy went galloping round first, second, third and then home.

Herring waited for no more. He went streaking off the field like a hare with a hound at its heels. Ten thousand throats "boo-ood" at him. But he quickly left that racket behind.

RETURNING aboard, Herring went up to the topside and sat down on his chest. He didn't take out a smoked herring and begin munching, for the reason that he didn't think about it; and for the same reason he didn't bother changing from his baseball clothes into the uniform of the day. He wasn't, in fact, doing any consecutive thinking at all. In his mind all was chaos, confusion, a swirling, boiling turmoil of jumbled, disconnected ideas, with one hideous, wolfish complex in the forefront—he was broke. His head felt like a white-hot furnace, yet in limbs and body he shook with chill.

After a while he noted that several gobs on the topside were reading letters. This meant that one of the tugs had brought mail for the fleet from Santiago. Perhaps there was a letter from Rosie. He went below to the post-office. There was. Rosie's letter ran:

"deer frend i thought i wood rite an tell you that my father thought i beter take joe, becaus father says a rolling stone is wurth 2 in the bush an a bird in the hand gethers no moss. joe is got 3 poolrooms now an a fine bootleg bisness an roomatizim an the dokter says his hart is week—an o yes a new kadilak, so father thought i beter take him an we was merried 2 weeks ago day before yesterday. father says time is money an you'll be in the navy 2 more yeers an maybe then i'll be a widow. father says i should tell you to save your money like a good boy—"

That letter broke Herring's back. There was nothing left now. Rosie gone; wooed and wedded by another, by that skunk of a Joe, with his dog's face and fish-eyes! Everything so all-of-a-sudden! A rich man with a dream in the morning, and a jilted pauper at night! What good was such a life? The bottom had dropped out of everything.

He went up the foremast, all the way up to the fighting-top—the "basket." Up there he hung over the rail for an hour, looking down upon the maze of men-o'-war riding at their anchors, and swearing softly but intensely into the cool breeze.

Presently, looking across the bay he saw boats and boats, laden with white-clad gobs, pushing out from Fisherman's Point. The baseball parties were returning. He soon made out the *Lou's* string of boats, in tow of a steam launch, not far in the offing. His returning shipmates were wild and hilarious with victory. Herring grinned. No doubt they thought they had a lot of fun coming, at his expense. They would get nicely fooled. Let them flout, if flout they must—but they'd flout over a dead man.

He pulled himself up onto the fighting-top rail, and sat looking down at the deck, a hundred and twenty feet below. He shuddered and his head swam, at thought of that fall; but with an effort he pulled himself together and set his jaws. Why not? It would be quick and sure. A second, the wink of an eye, and his troubles would be over. A fleeting instant of giddy, breathless falling, so quick in its passing that the sensation would scarce register in consciousness—then *crash!* —and he would be so much pulp—nothing. It would be like the bursting of a bubble.

Would Rosie cry? he wondered. He hoped she would. He hoped moreover that that dog-faced, fish-eyed skunk of a Joe would be arrested and get life imprisonment for gambling and bootlegging and wife beating; and that Rosie would be left with a half-dozen children to support.

And just then Herring had a mighty close call. Almost—in a momentary spell of dizziness he came very near falling. He leaned over just a little too far. His feet went up. He shrieked. But he caught himself. Then he got down off the rail and cursed softly.

In the first place he didn't want to die just then—right away, all of a sudden! He was in no hurry; he had plenty time. Besides, he had sixty dollars cash jack out in loans, at seven for five—eighty-four dollars. Then he had about two hundred dollars on the books—

"What the ——'s the use of a fellah dyin'?" he asked himself.

When he got down on deck the baseball party had returned aboard. He found Nelson seated on his chest. Herring would have passed on, but Nelson halted him.

"Herring," said the chief, "about that seven dollars you say Ducey owed you. We collected, for Ducey's mother and sisters, a little over a thousand dollars—a thousand and twelve dollars, I think it was. On top of that I borrowed four thousand, and bet it on today's game. We won, one to nothing. That four thousand I'm putting with the one thousand and twelve, making five thousand and twelve smacks for Ducey's mother and sisters. We'll deduct seven dollars from that, and pay Ducey's debt to you—so's to keep you from shootin' off your dirty bazoo in the future about what a poor dead lad owed you."

He handed Herring a five and two one dollar bills. There were tears in Herring's greedy little eyes as he took it.

"Chief, that was an awful game yuh put up on me," he whimpered.

Nelson jumped up and stood glaring down at him.

"You dirty rat! If you say that again I'll heave you over the side! Game! You put it up on yourself. Do you deny that you went out there today to throw that game, and skin me out of four thousand dollars? I say, do you deny it?"

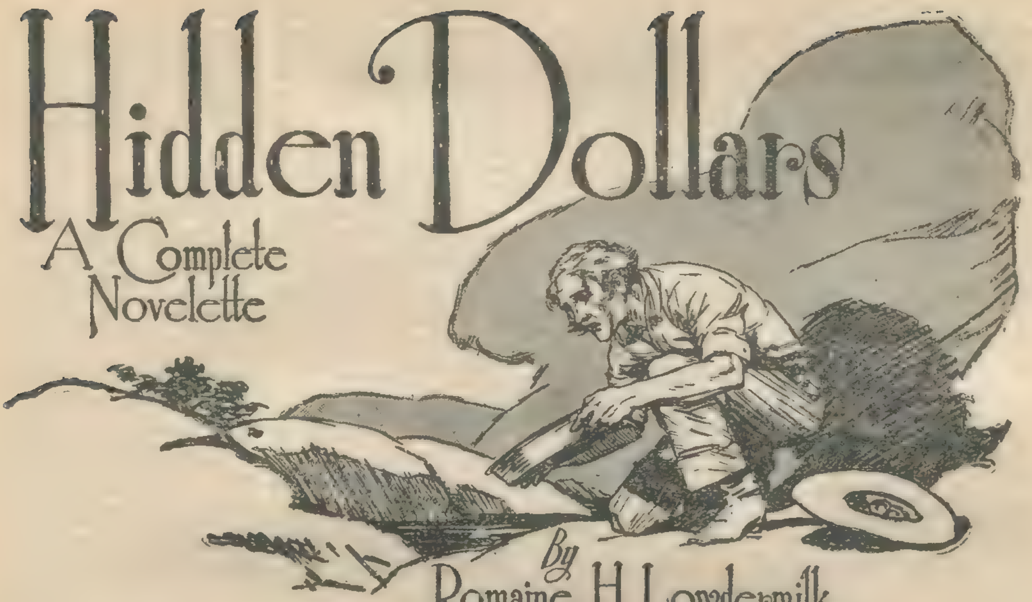
Herring made no reply. Nelson stood for a few moments glowering down upon him. Finally he turned and walked away. A short distance forward he turned.

"Herring," he said, "if I were you, I'd either buy out or run away."

Herring did. A few weeks later, when the *Rolling Lou* was at New York, one pay day, after drawing his money, collecting all he had out in loans, selling his clothes, and finishing the last of his smoked herring, he went ashore on liberty—and he never came back.

Hidden Dollars

A Complete Novelette



By Romaine H. Lowdermilk

Author of "The Passing of Pete Davila," "The Mantle of the Prophet," etc.

ELWIN HARPER was hurrying to his work at Jake Appodacker's General Store on a certain spring morning in 1883 when suddenly he found himself jostled in a deluge of male humanity that spewed from the wide-open doors of the Oro Fino Saloon. There was no shouting or chatter, but a mute earnest elbowing. From within the rapidly emptying saloon came the sound of shots.

Golden morning sunlight bathed the false-front one-storied buildings of stone and adobe that lined the crooked, narrow gulch street. The swarm of men that had burst from the Oro Fino scattered in all directions to disappear through the open doors of the adjacent places like prairie dogs scuttling into their earthy retreats.

A few paused on the sidewalk craning, peering back into the deserted barroom. Flame stabbed the shadows, and the shooting went on. One of the combatants cried out sharply, and a bullet crashed out through the transom over the heads of the lookers-on.

Elwin, fearing lest he be again late to his work and thus release the floodgate of Jake Appodacker's voluble remonstrances, had taken to the middle of the boulder-strewn street, ducked his head and gone flying past at full tilt.

Just ahead of him was one of the swampers from the freight teams, a narrow-faced youth of about Elwin's own age, rather gawky but with an athletic torso and lean, hard arms and legs. The young swamper's wide sombrero flapped in one hand as he ran and his thin jean trousers shinned halfway to his knees. About his waist was a wide leather belt to which was appended a sheath carrying a butcher knife.

Elwin recognized the apparition as Amos Hotfield, a Kentuckian and an occasional customer at Jake Appodacker's General Store. Now Elwin did not think highly of Amos Hotfield, for there existed between the two youths a certain, though as yet unexpressed, hostility. There was cause for this mutual disesteem. For not in all the Southwest was there a girl so favored with light step and grace of figure, bright lips and glossy hair as Miss Celestine Appodacker who, incredible as it may seem, was the daughter of Jake.

Celestine enjoyed the admiration of many suitors, yet she proferred encouragement to few and accepted the attentions of none. In the frontier town of Oro Fino there dwelt some four thousand more or less permanent residents, the great majority of them being men—men of every race and of every station in life. From old Jimmie Mahoney, owner of the Oro Fino gold mine, at that time the greatest gold-producing unit the West had ever known, clear down to "'Frisco" Al, the Chinese lad who was combining the

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occupations of dish-washing at Charlie Wong's and learning the gamblers' wiles under the tutelage of the nimble-fingered gambler at Queenie Mack's who went by the name of Frank Silk, Celestine could consider every man of them a bondslave.

But Elwin Harper seemed to have the inside track. He was handsome in a large-eyed urbane way; well set-up, vital, clean and trim. Besides, he was one of the two clerks employed in Jake Appodacker's emporium and, despite the occasional vial of wrath poured out upon the sleek head of his well-favored young employee, it was plain that Jake wished to promote the suit of this desirable youth before Celestine. And Jake Appodacker, being Pennsylvania Dutch, ruled his family with a firm hand—or thought he did. His wishes generally had considerable weight. But the best he could do in the case of Elwin was to have the young fellow up for supper once in a while. That was a lot. Nobody else ever got a free meal at the residence of the Appodacker family.

Of all Celestine's would-be suitors Jake favored least the unkempt, gawky young swamper with his faded jean pants, his long hair, his hungry, tanned face and his butcher knife. Yet without such men as Amos Hotfield, even Jake was forced to admit, Oro Fino with all its gold and bustle would have been a flat failure.

They went in pairs, those freighters, a skinner and a swamper with eight or ten mules and two ponderous wagons. They were the corpuscles that carried the life to the town of Oro Fino. They crept back and forth over the long winding trail and brought in the supplies from the railway one hundred and twenty miles away. They defied man-made weapons in the hands of the merciless Apaches and of the more deadly white desperado. They double-dared the incursions of fate—a collapsed wheel, a crumbling grade. They braved the broadsides of nature—thirst, hunger, storm. Few men made a success of it.

Amos Hotfield had been a swamper for two years and was in line for a skinner's job. He reveled in his hazardous calling. The spirit of adventure flamed in his breast. From the safe confines of his Kentucky village home the Far West had called him. And he had come.

Amos, looking back over his shoulder as he ran, saw Elwin hurrying along behind him. He slowed to a walk and Elwin fell into step.

"What—what's up back there?" Elwin asked. "I was just coming by when the shooting began. There must've been a dozen shots. One bullet came out through the front. I heard it whiz past my head. Who was it?"

"Them Frenchmen," Amos replied with a note of disgust. "They set out to kill one 'nother. It was turrible, what I seen of it. They got to fussin' oveh their gold nuggets—they had a canvas bag full—then they commenced hackin' one 'nother with them keen huntin' knives they carry. Lawsy! When they got too weak to cut they went for their guns. They wasn't five feet apart but they missed half the shots. Everybody lit out. One of them Frenchman was lyin' flat on his back on the floor a-shootin' at t'other'n propped ag'in' the bar. Whew!" Amos wiped his sleeve across his forehead, clapped on his wide hat and quickened his pace. "Worse'n ary hog-killin' I ever see. Whew!"

Elwin glanced back. The shooting had ceased and men swarmed the street, heading back toward the place. Elwin turned in at Appodacker's store, but Amos kept on toward the corrals that occupied the flat between the great stone warehouse and the little graveyard which that day would receive the two men whom Oro Fino had lost. There the company wagoner had his shop and the teamsters foregathered with their mules.

Jake Appodacker who always arrived early to open up his store was standing in the doorway peering interestedly at the commotion up the street when Elwin arrived.

"What is it, now?" he demanded excitedly "Somebody gettin' kilt, onct?"

Elwin told him.

"Say, look here. You mind the store now while I go," Jake ordered when Elwin had related what he knew of the incident at the Oro Fino saloon. "Now mind, and here's sumpun elts. When that Howard Osgood gets here you mind what time it is. That feller's been gettin' here later and later on me until I should guess I've got to fire him onct."

JAKE APPODACKER favored Elwin with an owlish glare to insure that his orders would be obeyed during his absence and stumped off up the street toward the scene of the morning's diversion. Jake was a short man, thick of limb and body, but not obese. His head was round and covered with a thick growth of dark hair, now rapidly filling with gray. His forehead was low and broad; his eyes pale blue and with curved under-lids that gave them a peculiarly mournful expression. He was a staunch Pennsylvanian and, twenty years before had served throughout the Civil War with the Union Army. He still maintained the erect carriage and arrogant stride that, as a youth in the blue uniform, he had so assiduously cultivated. With his cap pulled down tight upon his head, Jake marched into the saloon where lay the two Frenchmen who had killed each other. A brisk business was being driven at the bar, and Jake stopped to taste the temper of the offerings before proceeding with the object of his visit.

Everybody knew the two Frenchmen. One tall and the other short. They had been familiar visitors in Oro Fino, coming in as often as three times a year. For the past two years they had traveled widely, some said they had gone around the world, and their pockets were always filled with gold. This time they had been out in the desert hills but three weeks and when they returned they exhibited a bag containing more than a hundred pounds of gold—large rough nuggets that could have come only from an exceedingly rich and bountiful placer deposit.

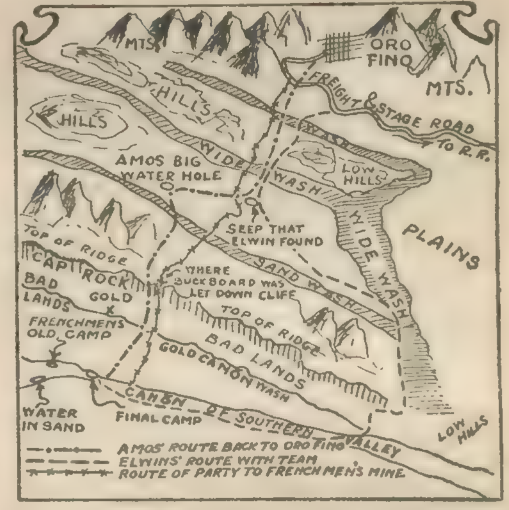
Once a man named Soto found their horses and buckboard at a place some ninety miles southwest of Oro Fino. The horses, Soto said, were standing in the shade of a giant *paloverde* tree, eating grama grass that had been cut with a shovel and carried to them. A barrel of water and two kegs stood near-by and two jugs of whisky hung in a tree. But there was no sign of the Frenchmen, though their camp was near-by. Soto was unable to find the water hole, so he filled his canteens at the barrel and set out for Oro Fino, traveling at night to conserve his water supply. He reached Oro Fino the third day, having been without water for twelve hours. It was a month before he recovered from his terrible trip across the desert ridges and malapai hills, but he immediately set about making preparation for an excursion with a team and a light wagon into the same country, for he felt he had stumbled on to the secret of the location of the Frenchmen's bonanza. He planned to go in search of it the next time the Frenchmen departed on one of their long trips.

The Frenchmen visited Oro Fino on their way to the outside world. And after they had gone—Soto was missing. His friends found him three or four days afterward down below the mill dump, his head more than a yard from his body.

From that time on few men had cared to seek the source of the Frenchmen's gold.

But it was Jake Appodacker who, on the bright morning of the Frenchmen's demise, hired two Mexicans to dig the two graves and paid the town carpenter to make the pine coffins.

"These men," he explained in response to questionings, "they have left their gold mine to my own Celestie a'ready."


MTS
ORO FINO
MTS.
HILLS
HILLS
FREIGHT & STAGE ROAD
TO R.R.
WIDE WASH
WASH
LOW HILLS
AMOS BIG WATER HOLE
SEEP THAT ELWIN FOUND
PLAINS
WIDE WASH
TOP OF RIDGE
CAP ROCK
WHERE BUCKBOARD WAS LET DOWN CLIFF
SAND WASH
BAD LANDS
GOLD
FRENCHMENS OLD CAMP
TOP OF RIDGE
BAD LANDS
GOLD CAÑON WASH
CAÑON DE SOUTHERN VALLEY
WATER IN SAND
FINAL CAMP
LOW HILLS
AMOS' ROUTE BACK TO ORO FINO
ELWINS' ROUTE WITH TEAM
ROUTE OF PARTY TO FRENCHMEN'S MINE

Old Jimmie Mahoney, owner of the Oro Fino mine and absolute ruler of the town that had grown up about his mine, came himself with the letter the Frenchmen had given him to be used as a will in which they bequeathed their most valuable possession to Celestine Appodacker. A chivalrous gesture of the gallant Frenchmen toward lovely femininity. Old Jimmie greeted everybody with his usual genial smile and examined the two Frenchmen to make sure they had complied with their part of the contract. He sighed heavily and made the sign of the cross. Then he stood up and opened the letter.

"Oi know what's in this letter," he stated apologetically. "The Frinchmen nayther of 'em could write, so they got me to do it. It isn't much, Jake, what they're givin' Celestine. Oi hope ye won't be overly disappointed."

He unfolded the single sheet and read:

"We, the undersigned, do hereby give and bequeath in case of our known death to Miss Celestine Appodacker—"

A rustle swept through the assembly as men strained closer to catch every word. For, should the location of the Frenchmen's mine be divulged, there would be a gold rush the like of which Oro Fino had never witnessed. Men loosened the guns in their holsters and the knives in their tight sheaths.

"Mebby now, you better bring to my store," suggested Jake, "and finish there onct. Don't let these fellers—"

" 'Tis nothing like ye think it is," said old Jimmie kindly.

Jake craned to see. Old Jimmie tipped the paper so the storekeeper could read with him as he completed the reading of the Frenchmen's will:

"—our most beloved possessions, to wit: Our team, Dick and Jim, and our buckboard, barrels, kegs and camp outfit. Signed—"

"Is that all?" demanded Jake in a disappointed tone, his sad eyes more melancholy than ever.

He took the paper, turned it over and looked at the back of it. He peered into the envelope, turned it up and tapped it gravely with a thick forefinger, his forehead corrugated with thought.

"It does now wonder me why they ain't told where the gold is. Team and wagon! What a—a—" He flung out his short arms and shrugged. "Team and wagon—barrel and kegs! Ach, my. Who wants a team onct, hey? How can I feed 'em? Bah. I should guess that's such a fine present for a girl, ain't it? Hay, hay, hay to buy, and grain—allus eatin' grain. I never heard such a likeness. It'll ruin me now to feed such a team, a'ready."

But old Jimmie Mahoney was wise in the ways of the desert. He plucked at Jake's sleeve and went with the merchant to his store. There he told him what the Frenchmen had said, but which had not been put in writing. In a low tone old Jimmie said sententiously—

"The horses know the way!"

Jake sat down suddenly upon a bale of blankets. He sat stiffly upright, his lugubrious eyes seeing nothing.

"I have afraid," he exclaimed in a small voice. "But I—I guess I'll go up and tell Celestie and the Missus onct. Thank you, Mr. Mahoney for tellin' me this—all."

But Jake had so far recovered his composure as to issue orders briskly upon setting out for his residence which perched on the steep mountainside overlooking the gulch street where, tier upon tier, rose the homes of the Oro Fino residents.

"You mind the store, Elwin, while I'm out; and you, Howard, that front window should have a washing ower. It's gettin' terrible dirty on us a'ready."

CELESTINE, a true Appodacker, could scarcely wait to finish the dinner dishes before hastening down to the corrals to inspect her horses. She didn't care so much for the buckboard, barrels, kegs and camp outfit, but to own a horse—two of them! She slipped away from the house while Papa Jake was taking his afternoon nap. Tripping down the steep pathway, she cut across behind her father's store and on to the corrals.

"Oh, just see them. They're eating!" Celestine, a flutter of youth and beauty and wide flowered skirts, had vaulted the heavy corral fence and was heading straight for her team standing at one of the feed troughs. She knew they were her horses, for they were the only horses in the inclosure, and were being fed at a manger apart from the mules. She halted before the trough and gazed raptly at the tough desert horses.

"Just see them eat!" she exclaimed joyously.

"Right peart horses," observed Amos Hotfield, shyly venturing beside the girl.

"Oh, do you think they'd let me ride them?" Celestine turned her eager face squarely to Amos. "I'd love that."

Amos's hat was in his hands and he dropped it when she faced him. His fingers sought to brush back from his face the long locks of hair that hung to his shoulders, locks hacked squarely off with a knife. His feet shuffled in an embarrassed manner, but his face glowed with pleasure.

"Yes mam, I reckon they would," he replied. "They got saddle marks on their backs."

Amos got one of the teamsters' saddles from the harness room and placed it upon the back of the smaller and more docile-appearing of the pair.

Celestine pretended to be looking at the horse, but her eyes were upon the gawky swamper saddling Little Jim. Jim had taken the bridle readily enough, but when Amos reached for the cinch, the nimble desert horse kicked him on the hand, bucked off the saddle and galloped to the far corner of the corral.

Amos peered in surprize at the horse, then transferred his gaze to his hand. He examined it thoroughly, shook it and grinned at the girl.

"Didn't hurt," he announced. "Kinda su'prized me, though."

"I—I don't think I want to ride him, anyway."

Amos picked up the saddle and blankets, dusted them and laid them in readiness in the center of the corral. He walked slowly over to the horse, coaxed it, placed a tie-rope about its neck and led it, protesting, to the saddle. He held it by the bit as he put the saddle on its back, and this time he poked the latigo strap through the cinch ring from a position at the horse's shoulder. Little Jim, being accustomed to harness, made no objection until the youth drew up on the cinch. Around and around they whirled, Amos in the center, one hand holding the tie-rope firmly about four inches from Little Jim's neck and the other busily tightening the cinch.

Celestine was surprized that the young swamper's face showed no excitement. His narrow countenance was solemn and imperturbed as a log; his brown eyes were narrowed a trifle, but steady. He spoke soothingly in a low tone to the horse, but Little Jim paid no attention. Dust belched upward and drifted lazily off. The other horse fretted in his manger, and the mules at the side of the corral looked inquiringly toward the commotion.

The saddle in place Amos' booted foot slipped into the stirrup, and, with his left hand still on the rope and his right in the mane, he leaped into the saddle. His right foot never found its stirrup. For no sooner had he left the ground than Little Jim's head went down and he wheeled out across the corral in a series of crooked, pitching leaps.

The bridle reins were dangling about the horse's ears, but the young swamper clung to the neck rope and whooped as Little Jim got down to pitching, as only a desert-bred cayuse with a week's rest and all the hay and grain he wants can pitch. Amos gripped the rope and clamped his long legs to the active sides of his mount. His hat fell off and his long hair flapped grotesquely. His faded jean trousers began to climb his legs and his cotton shirt-tail waved a distress signal. The wagoner and his helpers and Pete Davila, the boss teamster, and a few miners who happened to be off shift near-by formed an interested audience at that side of the corral, while Celestine viewed the skirmish from the opposite side.

Amos remained on the horse as long as he could—probably he stayed with it as long as any other swamper could. One could have counted ten, slowly, before Little Jim got the best of the engagement and bucked Amos over the front of the low teamsters' saddle. There Amos balanced a moment, his long arms flailing the air like a Dutch windmill, and then he toppled sidewise and met the ground with a grunt. Little Jim kicked at him and trotted archly to the side of his mate.

The young swamper scrambled to his feet almost as soon as he hit the ground. It appeared as if his gawky frame bounded erect. He looked about dazedly, found his hat, clapped it on his head and started for the horse. Celestine caught her breath for she feared he intended to punish the tumultuous little beast, and she did not intend to see her horses abused.

She looked upon Amos with a kind of horror. His measured tread and his disregard of the sarcastic gibes of the wagoner and his crowd seemed to the girl like the ominous attitude of an executioner going out to perform his duty. Each instant she expected a storm of violence and abuse to break over the back of her luckless Little Jim.

But Amos merely went alongside the larger horse, reached under his neck and retrieved the tie-rope. With this in hand he ducked in front of Dick and approached Little Jim hand over hand along the rope.

Jim backed until Amos' hand patted his nose. Then he leaped forward. Stepping aside from the rush, Amos grounded himself solidly and pulled Little Jim around. With a few careless pats and gentle words he calmed the pony's fears and removed the saddle.

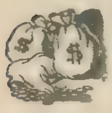
"I reckon them was harness marks what I mistook fer saddle marks," he grinned as he led Little Jim back to the manger. "I 'low the big feller'll saddle all right," he went on, untying Dick's halter rope and easing the saddle to his back, "them Frenchmen must've had one of 'em so's he'd ride."

Solemnly and purposefully, as he had saddled the smaller horse, so saddled he the larger one. Without a moment's hesitation or heed to the criticism freely offered by the masculine side of his audience, he lurched up into the saddle.

"Half of 'em's good to ride, anyhow," he declared as Dick trotted off at an easy, willing gait. Amos grinned widely, his large white teeth in odd contrast to the bronze of his skin tanned by two years of wind and sun. "I shore like these hosses. They're tough as whang, both of 'em."

Twenty minutes later old Jimmie Mahoney looked out from the window of his private office in the thick stone building that housed the mining company's affairs. His eyes followed along the white scar where the long trail came down on the opposite mountainside. Halfway down stalked a lean, faded figure. It was Amos Hotfield, the young swamper. He was leading a horse that stepped carefully along as if conscious of the precious freight he bore. For in the saddle, sitting decorously and uncomfortably sidewise, was Celestine Appodacker, thoroughly enjoying her first ride on a horse. Old Jimmie's honest Celtic blue eyes swept the barren slopes of the mountainside and went on to the black malapai ramparts that frowned over the camp. There was not a tree in sight, not a flower. A white sky came down to meet a black horizon. He sighed.

" 'Tis a sorry country f'r love making," he pronounced dolefully. "But these boys and girls, they find a way." He moved his head sagely. "Even in a mule corral, or on a freight trail they'll find a courting bower."



"I GUESS anyhow not!" Jake Appodacker pounded upon the counter, and thus tersely dismissed the tentative suggestion put forth by Elwin Harper that he, Elwin, should be allowed to accompany Jake on his trip in search of the Frenchmen's gold deposit.

"Oh well, I can stay here and handle this business for you," Elwin remarked carelessly, his eyes lighting up as they darted about the little store piled with its miscellany of merchandise, so valuable at that isolated post. "Of course you'd have to leave some one in charge here and I'm familiar with the stock, you know, Mr. Appodacker."

"Yah!" rumbled Jake, "this place will go closed up. I'll shut it up till I get good and back onct. Now, Elwin, you got to make me an errant. Go tell Dave Lankford I'd give him two dollars a night to sleep in this store while I'm off. Tell him that. Make quick now."

Elwin returned followed by Dave Lankford, the old Indian fighter, who carried his meager roll of bedding under one arm and in the other hand a long, eight-square Sharps single-shot rifle, 40-90 calibre and the most powerful gun of its day.

"I'm glad to see you, Mister Lankford, so," Jake greeted him. "But still, anyways, I would bet now that you couldn't earn two dollars a night otherwise any easier."

"That's why I'm hyar," admitted Dave, plumping the bedding down in the middle of the counter. "Hyar's headquarters till ye gits back."

"I trusts you here, Mister Lankford, with my key," Jake reminded the old Indian fighter. "I wouldn't have anybody elts yet, I bet you. I know you're an honest man a'ready, for Mister Jimmie Mahoney, he trusts you to go along with the stage and guard the gold. Well—" Jake drew a long breath and handed his key to Dave, "here's the key. I know everything will be safe with you in it. For old Jimmie, he trusts you to be honest a'ready, the same like I do, Mister Lankford."

"Aw, yer stuff'll all be hyar," drawled Dave, with careless confidence. "I'll fight off ——till ye git back. But be dang keerful, Dutch, thet ye git back. Them desert trips is—" Dave searched his limited vocabulary for a suitable word. "Them desert trips—is—just—plain—hell!"

Jake jumped. His eyes nearly crossed in their concentrated gaze upon nothing at all as his mind wrestled with that awesome data.

"Well, anyway," he argued lamely, "them Frenchers made it."

"Who's goin' with ye?"

There it was again. Jake shook his head darkly. It seemed to him that everybody thought he needed a companion. He resented that.

"Ain't it so a man can go with his team and buggy without somebody tagging along with?" he demanded with full measure of scorn.

"Ye better take a partner along," advised Dave, grimly, "er two."

"Who, then?" queried Jake in a much less hostile timbre.

"Not me. I had enough o' thet twenty year ago. Git some young sprout. Ye need men—young men."

"But me," Jake Appodacker tugged his hat down to his ears to hide his thick graying hair. "Lookit me. I'm young yet. I'm forty-seven only."

"Ye're a bag o' mush." retorted Dave. "I doubt ef ye'll live through th' trip. Still, ye're tough, an' mebby ye'll make it ef th' sun don't git ye. But ye'll shore need a partner er two, just th' same."

"That is just what I have been telling him," put in Elwin. "I want to go. I'm willing to take my chances with anything that may come up." Elwin struck his hands together and dusted his palms with a great display of vigor. "I would enjoy the hardships."

Dave Lankford emitted a non-committal grunt. He unrolled his blankets on the counter and sprawled upon them at ease.

Jake's sad eyes looked about the familiar store room with its shelves of canned goods, bales of blankets, piles of rough clothing, wooden boxes of dried fruits, candles, and he sniffed the ever-present odor of oil, soap and tobacco-smoke as if loathe to leave. Of a certainty he wanted to return. Rather to take a partner than to run the risk of perishing upon the desert.

"Well, Elwin, I—I should guess mebby Dave's right, anyhow. You can go with."

"Done!" exclaimed Elwin jubilantly. "If we find the mine there'll be plenty for both. The Frenchmen always had their thousands."

At mention of the now deceased Frenchmen Jake looked about apprehensively. This thing of having a gold mine wasn't any sinecure. First he had to hire a watchman at two dollars a night, and then he had to share his gold with a young upstart maybe just to save himself from dying of sunstroke out on the desert.

"No!" he blustered. "I would die first. Better now I should go alone."

"Dave Lankford says you need a young man along," protested Elwin desperately, "and he knows. You've got to have a partner. Why, you might go crazy in the desert of the heat—"

Jake envisaged himself staggering across the rocky, heat-riven wastes, crying for water.

"Sure, sure," he agreed rashly. "Mebby I do take me a partner along onct. I know that much without nobody saying it back always. I should guess I ain't no softy, but if Mister Lankford says I need a partner now I guess you can go, and I'll give you a share."

Jake always drove a shrewd bargain.

"Of course," he went on, "the team belongs to my Celestie. Them Frenchmens want that she should have the mine, too, a'ready. But she, herself, couldn't make nothing with finding it off out there where it is at. So you and me, we will go find it for. Then she gets half and I gets half and you gets a share of what I gets. Now that's fair enough, ain't it?"

"Oh, anything suits me," declared Elwin, carelessly. "It's the sport of the thing I'm after. I guess there'll be plenty for all if we find what we're looking for." And he thought of the fortune that would fall to the bright lad who should be lucky enough to marry Celestine. "I'll go with you and take whatever share you feel like giving me."

"Well, I got to be getting," said Jake. He left the key with Dave and, with Elwin, left the store. Jake turned off at the corner and ambled up the steep pathway that led to the rows of homes perched upon the mountainside above the business street.

"We'll start off early in the morning, Elwin," he reminded the younger man, "early! Come up to our house tonight and have supper with."

AT HIS own residence Jake went to the round-topped trunk that held his personal and long-hoarded belongings. He began at the top and turned out everything until he hit bottom. Then he piled the stuff all back. His grumbling disturbed Mama Appodacker. She appeared from the kitchen, her hands in her apron. The floor creaked at every measured step.

"What now, papa? Ain't you lost sumpun again! Where is it?"

"Palm-leafer fans," snapped Jake. "I remember wery distinctually of putting them palm-leafer fans into the bottom of my trunk. Flat. Somebody's come an' broke into the house onct and stoled them palm-leafer fans out."

"I guess not, anyhow," defended Mamma Appodacker. "Not with me in this house day in and day out. You should cry ower them there palm-leaf fans when you took them up from your trunk yourself."

"I ain't crying none," Jake went on slamming his possessions back into the trunk, "but it would seem like you'd told me where they was before."

Mamma withered him with her glance.

"Yes, mebby you could of told me what you'd lost, first," she sniffed. "It's always something or other you lost it. I never heard such a man. Lookit."

Mamma pointed to the three palm-leaf fans tacked upon the parlor wall as a sort of decoration. The fans formed a central piece. At their right dangled a large empty box with gilded edges and a lithograph of an oriental dancing girl and tied with a red, red ribbon. A dashing young clothing salesman who visited Oro Fino occasionally in the interests of his line had sent the box of candy to Celestine from Kansas City. The entire Appodacker family had enjoyed the sweets and the box had been thus enshrined.

"There's your palm-leaf fans," mamma finished superiorly.

"I guess I wasn't seein' just so good," apologized Jake.

He got a chair and balanced upon it while he looked closely at the palm-leaf fans. One was split a couple of times and part of its binding was torn off. The next was split once and had all its binding. The third was neither split nor lacking any of its parts. Jake chose the worst one, pried out the tack and got down. He fanned himself with it and smiled pleasantly.

"Ho, it works fine, Mamma," he said. "I'm goin' to take one of these fans on the trip with. I should guess I won't get sunstruck or over-het."

"But you ain't going." declared mamma. "Not into this desert you ain't. Sippose you was to git lost—or Injins—"

"Now, Mamma," Jake soothed, patting her ample shoulders. "Now, Mamma, I didn't come along for three years with the boys from Pennsylwania in the war and got back safe and sound yet, did I, huh?" Jake fanned as he talked. Mamma threw her arms about his neck. "Well, can't I go out there a few days and get home again onct?" Jake argued. "Besides, I will take me along a man with. Dave Lankford said to."

"Who?"

"Elwin Harper."

"Bah. Sissy." Mamma released her hold. "Was you *verrict*, whatever?"

"Well now I've made a deal with him a'ready," Jake defended. "Dave Lankford said I better take him with. And he goes with. And I am going." Jake's voice rose louder. "And I *am* going, and he is going. And that's flat enough and a-plenty."

"But ach, my," wailed mamma, "sippose —sippose—"

"Bah! Sippose," mocked Jake.

Mamma Appodacker's arms flew about his neck and she commenced to sob.

Jake embraced his spouse tightly and scolded harder.

"You make me sick," he declared. "I never heard such a holler. Now a body'd think you wanted us to remain parpers all our lifes here. Think of what we got—a gold mine! We got the Frenchers' mine what everybody has been wondering about ever since we been here and mebby before that yet." He shook himself free and stalked back to his trunk. "With a chanct like this, and you puttin' a holler up!"

The four younger Appodacker children had trooped in during the parley of their elders. Their coming signified that the hour was four P. M. and that the adobe school at the upper end of the street had closed shop for the day. They stood stock still and listened to the debate, but did not interrupt. When silence was restored they went out on the porch and discussed the great news among themselves.

Celestine came up presently. The younger Appodackers rushed to meet her halfway up the path.

"O-o-oh, papa's goin' to hunt the gold mine!" shouted Fred, the youngest. "Papa's goin' to hunt the gold mine. Papa's goin' to hunt—"

"Celestine, you old darling!" gushed Marion, sixteen. "Those men actually presented you with one real, whole gold mine. Have you seen it yet? Do you know where it is? You look all excited. Where is some of the gold?"

August, who was seven, clung to Celestine. "Papa and Elwin are going after the mine. Make papa let me go, too," he wheedled.

"If August goes, I go too," declared Mabel, stopping to pull up her stockings. "I'm tired of school, anyhow. D'you s'pose papa'll let us go along? He's got a team now, hasn't he?"

Celestine passed into the house, the younger children about her. Papa had collected his out-door clothing in a neat pile and was contemplating a raid on a large part of mamma's cooking equipment for the use of Elwin and himself on their projected camping tour. Celestine soon was helping her mother prepare the supper and set the table with the best dishes against the coming of Elwin.

"PAPA, did I understand you to say that you and Elwin are going out with the team to find the Frenchmen's gold mine?"

The supper had progressed happily enough until Celestine lightly tossed her glowing brand into the light chatter. Her father bridled.

"Sure," he replied. "Why not, so?"

Celestine smiled inscrutably.

"Can either of you drive? Can either of you take care of a team?"

Jake looked at Elwin with sudden apprehension. Here loomed a fresh obstacle. He had never owned a horse before, so he left the burden of reply upon Elwin.

"Sure, I can handle the team, all right," Elwin stated cock-surely. "Anybody can."

"Elwin, he can han'le the team," seconded Jake, with relief. "They'd go straight to the mine, anyhow, I guess, ain't it?"

"I guess so," replied Elwin, vaguely.

"See?" boasted Jake.

"All right."

Celestine's voice held a firm note that caused her father to straighten up and prepare for the worst. But she addressed Elwin.

"How much grain—barley like they feed out here—should horses the size of Dick and Jim be fed at each meal?"

"I never fed any barley," evaded Elwin. "Oats is all I ever heard of a horse eating."

"All right, oats, then."

"Oh, about a—quart—" Elwin caught the look of scorn in Celestine's eyes and quickly changed his estimate—"a bushel."

"You give them a gallon-can full," the girl announced proudly. "It's a tin can like the fruit comes in. Well, you give them that full three times a day. And they've got to have hay, too."

"Sure," agreed Jake.

Elwin nodded. "Oh, it's been a long time since I—uh, fed horses. I forgot."

"Now here." Celestine turned her level eyes upon her father. "It won't do for you two to go out into this desert with the team. Something would happen and you'd both suffer and the horses wouldn't have half care. There's a lot of difficult country to cross and you will be obliged to live off the country, depend upon finding grass and water. You must know just how much the team can stand, for your lives will depend upon the team. Dick and Jim are the best desert horses around here, people say, but they must have a man in charge who knows how to take care of them, keep them shod, fed and watered. I—"

"You talk like we was going around the world onct," objected Jake. "My goodness You wimmenfolks!"

"I didn't know you were going." Celestine tipped her bright head at Elwin, disregarding her father's remark. "I thought you'd take charge of the store. But it wouldn't have made any difference. I have hired a man to go with papa. I've made an agreement with him to go along and take care of the team"—she laughed nervously—"and he goes."

"Who?" grunted Jake glumly.

"Amos Hotfield."

"What!" shouted Jake and Elwin in unison.

"Look here, child," Jake went on hoarsely. "You ain't got up an' told that wild feller we're goin' to hunt the gold mine? Girl, I never heard such a foolishness. You'll ruin me! He's like to cut all our heads off for us. Him and his butcher knives! My gosh, do you want we should diwide with everybody in camp up? Why, that feller, he's a—a copperhead; he's a—ninny, a scare-crows, a rebel, a—a—"

"Now, papa," calmed Celestine. "Do be reasonable. I merely want to send along a man who is experienced with horses and knows how to meet conditions of travel in this sort of country. I knew you didn't know anything about taking care of horses and I thought you'd be glad to have someone along to—to do the work for you."

"Bah!" Papa Appodacker clutched at his paternal authority. "We will see onct."

"We don't need that fellow," grumbled Elwin.

"Dick and Jim are my horses," stated Celestine, her face white. "And I will chose their driver or—or they don't go."

"Ach, my!" cried papa. "Such an unthankfelt child. Hear. Did you hear her, now?"

"Amos Hotfield says he has plenty of

camp equipment," went on Celestine calmly "He says all you will need to bring is your own bed roll and what clothes you need. He is to have the team and buck-board ready early in the morning and the water barrel and kegs and canteens all filled with water. And the grain for the horses will be in sacks ready to load after you put in what food supplies you will need."

"A body'd think he was running this picnic," grumbled Jake, but without resentment. "Everybody wants to go gold hunting by me."

"You'll be glad you've got him," exclaimed Celestine, reaching impulsively to clasp one of her father's square paws in both her own. "It's so dangerous. So be careful, papa." She brightened. "I have faith in Amos Hotfield. He's so competent—around horses, anyway."

The start was made the following morning. Amos Hotfield peremptorily vetoed about half of Elwin's luggage and held him down to the clothing he wore and a change of underwear and plenty of socks. Jake, too, was sent back to his home with the extra clothing and much of the bedding with which he had supplied himself. Jake, once accustomed to the scant clothing and blankets of the Civil War had hoped to avoid a repetition of such hardship on this trip, but he accepted the decree philosophically.

"One quilt an' two blankets apiece, fellers," was Amos' ultimatum. "Tain't likely to rain, an' if the nights is too cold we c'n all sleep togetheh. We got a wagon sheet, fer to put oveh us."

The water barrel, two kegs and three canteens, together with the grain for the horses, made up the greater portion of the load. Bacon, beans, flour and coffee, supplied from the shelves of Jake Appodacker's store, a little tea, sugar, rice, dried-beef, baking powder, matches, salt, pepper and mustard, together with their arms and ammunition, plenty of ammunition, made up about one-fourth of the load. The buckboard was loaded at the rear of Jake's store, with Dave Lankford obligingly assisting. Mamma Appodacker was there, and Celestine. The four little Appodackers barely missed being tardy on account of it and only the direst threats had served to drive them from the fascinating preparations off to the hum-drum routine at school.

When the cargo was all in place Amos covered the entire load with his strong heavy canvas wagon sheet and tied it firmly into place with a fine long lash rope.

"Where are we going to ride?" interrogated Elwin.

"Ride?" Amos turned upon the other youth in astonishment. "Ride!" he exclaimed. Then he lowered his voice to its customary pleasing drawl. "We got to save the hosses in every way we can," he explained. "This buckboard is loaded to th' gills right now an' th' team couldn't haul a heavieh outfit. We'll hit some turrible rough country afore we git very far. We c'n walk a-plenty fast as the team will go."

Amos picked up the lines and clucked to the team. They started off at a steady walk. Jake Appodacker and Elwin, after appropriate good-bys, dropped in, side by side, behind.

"Walkin' good exercise," Dave Lankford called after them. "Ye fellers'll git ust t' it in a few days, mebby. Afore ye hit them Frenchmen's camp ye'll find out whut real walkin' is."

* * *

THEY headed south. There was no doubt about their being on the right trail at the start for Amos drove the team along the identical wheel-tracks left by the Frenchmen as they came into Oro Fino on their last earthly journey together but a few days previous. Whenever they passed a clump of grass along the route Amos halted the team and, with the camp shovel, cut it off and stowed it in the buckboard. At noon he unhitched and gave the horses their nosebags of grain and a bucket of water each from the kegs. Jake and Elwin had drained two of the three canteens, each of which held one gallon. They refilled them while Amos set out the lunch. Amos, accustomed as he was to the sun and wind and long waterless drives had taken but an occasional sip from his canteen.

Burned rock and malapai ridges reared their barren slopes all about them. Only cactus and desert sage clung to the arid reaches long ago burned out by interior fires and a merciless sun. But it was good traveling, for the malapai in the swales and saddles was shattered and closely packed, making a fairly smooth surface in which the wagon wheels made barely an impression.

"Every time we top a rise," Amos directed, "you fellers take a good look behind—watch out fer anybody what might foller us."

"Somebody foller us?" echoed Jake. "The schwindlers!"

"Nobody ever followed the Frenchmen," argued Elwin.

"Feller named Soto did—once," replied Amos succinctly.

Jake, remembering the grim tale, shivered and looked back fearsomely. And on the journey all the rest of the afternoon he carried his old army rifle, the Spencer carbine he had acquired after the war, and which kicked so viciously that he dreaded using it.

They progressed fifteen miles that day, southward from Oro Fino before making camp for the night. Amos set Jake and Elwin to preparing the evening meal while he unharnessed and watered the horses. After he had given Dick and Jim their nosebags and their grama-grass hay, of which he had some forty pounds collected through the day, Amos made a wide circuit about the camp in search of water. There had been a rain over the desert region in December and as it was now barely the middle of March he felt certain many of the potholes in the malapai rock would contain water, especially in the washes where the sand could cover the water and protect it from evaporation. Amos had found natural pot-holes of water in other parts of the desert that were as smooth inside as though polished, and without a crack or seam. They varied in size from a thimble to forty feet across and from fifteen to thirty feet deep. But the rock was too broken in this district to hold water and he gave up the search at dusk.

The next morning they got a late start. Elwin and Jake had had a hard time with the breakfast, and Amos obligingly made the bread and showed them the proper use of the dutch-oven, that handy utensil of cast-iron, which occupied the place of prominence even above the skillet in the camp outfit of the freighter and prospector. In the humble dutch-oven was baked the bread; in it the beans and the stews were cooked. It was used as a teakettle for heating water and a dishpan for the washing of dishes. Fortunately Jake was somewhat experienced in the art of camp cooking and he grasped the convenience of the dutch-oven almost at once.

"Don't waste the wateh," Amos had felt obliged to warn Elwin, aghast at the youth's extravagant splashing at the tin wash-basin and again at the task of dish-washing. "We've got to be careful with wateh."

"If you don't like my way, try your own hand at the dishes," Elwin flung the dish-cloth on a stone and stood up.

"All right," agreed Amos patiently, "but I was just a-goin' to hook up the team. But I'll wash 'em an' you hook up."

Elwin glanced at the harness lying by the buckboard and at the two horses, then he picked up the dish-cloth and bent over the pan.

All that day they climbed through malapai passes and over ridges that grew more and more rugged and stony. Occasionally they saw the trail left by the Frenchmen. But it was clear these men had never traveled any regular trail. It appeared they came and went, each time by a different route to avoid marking out a definite trail that might be followed. They left it to the wind and rain to obliterate their wagon tracks, and the roughness of the country and its lack of water to guard their gold discovery. For there were times of the year during the hot months when no man, not even themselves, could reach the mine, because it would be impossible to carry sufficient water for the journey, and there would be no water along the route after the sun had had a fair chance at the hidden holes.

Amos cut grama-grass with the shovel or left the team resting while he climbed high peaks to obtain a view of the country ahead or seek sign of possible pursuit from the rear. He grew more and more concerned about the water. At noon the second day the horses finished the two five gallon kegs and Jake and Elwin had poked the hose down into the top bung of the barrel, sucked out the air, and siphoned their canteens and a panful for camp use at noon.

The sun was setting when they pulled in between two rough hills where they found an abundance of grama and *galleta* grass. Saving the hay he had cut, Amos put one horse on the picket line and let the other run loose after giving them all the water they wanted.

"Thought you said to be careful with the 'wateh'," snapped Elwin, as he held the bucket under the siphon hose while each horse gulped three bucketfuls.

"The hosses are doing th' work—most of it," Amos smiled. "They got to be comfortable if we c'n fix it fer 'em."

When the horses were cared for, he again made a long search for water as upon the previous evening, but without success.

There was something like enchantment in the early morning view. They knew it was a mirage, but the wonder of it was undimmed. High turrets, peaks and domes seemed suddenly to spring out of the distant plain and string out for miles along the horizon. Sombrero Mountain, exactly like a Mexican hat, often seemed to be rent in twain by a mighty chasm, the high vertical walls apparently solid and substantial. The break appeared first as a narrow cut which grew wider and wider until the sky cleared with the rising sun and only the low purpling hills shimmered in the heat, far at the rim of the desert.

THEY were entering a country where traveling was not so good as in the malapai. The wagon wheels made a distinct track all the way and in some places they encountered sandy strips a quarter of a mile wide. All trace of the Frenchmen's tracks had been wiped out by the wind and drifting sand, but the horses forged ahead toward the southwest as if they knew where to go. It made heavy pulling. The sun seemed hotter and sweat dried in white streaks on the hips of the horses. Amos was anxious for the welfare of the beasts. He cautioned Jake and Elwin again to be careful of water waste. At noon each of the horses took two buckets of water and wanted more. Amos veered a trifle to the right, during the afternoon, to reach a range of low hills that seemed to offer a likely place for waterholes in the rock, and they made an early camp.

"Now we fellers have got to get out an' hunt wateh," Amos told them. "The sun won't set for three hours an' these hills look good for pot holes in the washes. We'll each go a different direction, walk till sundown, then come back to camp. But be shore an' keep a-lookin' back an' makin' note of landmarks as you go, fer feah you can't find yore way back. You'd ought to come back by a little different direction than what you go, so's to hunt wateh all the way, goin' an' comin."

Amos, as he talked, had unharnessed the team and was getting out the nosebags to give the horses a good feed, as usual.

It was the duty of Jake and Elwin at this time to siphon water from the barrel for the horses. Dick and Jim were ever alert when the water bucket rattled. Their noses quivered gently as with soft whickerings they called on the men to hurry up, their eyes upon the water bucket in Jake's hand.

Elwin climbed on the load, removed the canvas from the big water-barrel, pulled out the plug and ran one end of the small suction hose down into the barrel. Jake, standing on the ground with the bucket, put the other end of the hose to his lips and gave a strong pull to exhaust the air, whereupon water should siphon into the bucket. But no water came.

"Whatever's the matter with this hose a'ready?" he exclaimed as he took a good breath and pulled again. "Must be a hole into it," he concluded, since no water followed his effort. "Give us down the other end onct."

Elwin pulled the hose from the barrel and exchanged ends with Jake. Jake held the hose at arm's length and regarded it darkly.

"There ain't no water on to it," he gasped.

True enough. No water dripped from the hose that had been in the barrel. It was dry.

"Drop it into the barrel back," Jake shouted excitedly. "Mind now, make quick. Put it clean to the bottom, a'ready."

Jake wriggled impatiently as Elwin, now thoroughly alarmed, poked the hose back into the hole at the top of the barrel. Down, down he shoved it until more than half its length had disappeared into the depths. Jake put his mouth to the other end and sucked and panted and sucked again.

"Ach, my," he wailed. "Our water is all! Ach, my. The barrel is empty!" He seized up his canteen and drained the last drop into his palpitating gullet.

"Sufferin' Moses," yelled Amos as he left off filling the nose bags and sprang upon the buckboard. He gave the barrel a shake and a kick. It gave forth a hollow sound. The horses moved closer and nickered coaxingly. Amos scattered things in the buckboard and turned the barrel down.

The bottom plug was halfway out. The square of tin that had held it in place now hung by two rusted tacks. The water had dribbled to waste along the route since the noon hour.

"Ach, my," groaned Jake, turning in his tracks and gazing back toward Oro Fino forty-nine miles away. "You rebel. You want to kill us a'ready."

Elwin snatched up his canteen and glared at Amos accusingly.

"Seems like you'd have looked over this outfit before you started," he snapped.

"I neveh thought of this here barrel springin' a leak," exclaimed Amos contritely. "Never once thought of it. Lawsy!" And he, too, gazed across the tumbled waste toward the distant blue mountains where lay Oro Fino. "She's nigh fifty mile to camp, fellers. All the wateh we got is in our canteens heah. Mebby there's some in the coffee pot—" he peered into the depths of that blackened receptacle—"yep, there's a pint or so—coffee. That'll go a long ways. But we'll have a tussle to git back to Oro Fino on what we got."

Dick and Jim whinnied impatiently.

"Them pore horses is sufferin' fer wateh," Amos stated thoughtfully. "If we got to hit back fer Oro Fino they'll have a turrible time a-makin' it."

Amos took the tin wash basin and gave each horse a quart from his canteen.

"I got two quarts left fellers," he announced. "How much you got?"

"Mine is all!" moaned Jake, holding his canteen upside down to prove his statement.

Elwin removed the stopper of his and peered into it.

"About a quart in mine, I guess," he stated accusingly. "If you hadn't been making us save so on the water we might all of us had full canteens, at any rate."

"Mebby so," agreed Amos. "Well, I'll put my two quarts into yours. Then we'll have two empty canteens, Jake's and mine, to pack along while we hunt fer wateh. If we find enough to fill 'em we'll make her back to town. Hold out yore canteen."

Elwin reluctantly held forth his canteen while Amos poured into it. Barely a pint sufficed to fill the receptacle.

"Why," exclaimed Amos cheerily. "We got mo' wateh than we thought. Why, that makes one full gallon besides what I got heah. We ain't half bad off. I'll put the rest of mine in the coffee pot, then we'll all strike out fer wateh holes. We'd ought to find some around heah, shore. If not, it's throw off the load an' strike out fer Oro Fino with the hosses."

The horses refused to eat their grain, keeping their eyes longingly upon the water barrel. Amos removed the nose bags and tied the horses to separate shrubs and gave each his share of grama hay.

"You, Jake, go that way," Amos indicated the south, "and you, Elwin, go east. Looks like good wateh country off that way. I'll take the west. That big dome off there may have a cañon at the bottom just plumb full of wateh. Hunt as long as you can, fellers, then come to camp an' wait heah fer the others. Keep an eye out fer landmarks. If we don't find wateh we got to hit fer Oro Fino tonight."

THEY left camp. Amos was the the only one that realized fully how serious was the situation. There was less than two gallons of water in camp and the horses would need most of that. He started off, walking as rapidly as possible. The mountains became rougher as Amos plunged through them, scanning the formation for sign of a hole in the rock that would be likely to contain water. He traversed miles of sandwash in search of the damp spot that would betray the presence of water, trapped beneath the sand. There was no liklihood of finding living water or a spring of any sort in that eruptive country. He crossed ridges and explored the gulches on all sides. It was sundown when he found a deep narrow cañon leading down from the great dome. Before he had climbed to its floor and was hurrying up its course the moonlight was beginning to show through the darkening of the day. Black walls of rock rose on either side and the gorge narrowed as Amos advanced, hemming him in on both sides. But he kept on with buoyant steps, for this was the sort of place he had been seeking. He kept steadily ahead for almost an hour. Without the moon the place would have been a cavern. Its ghostly rays illumined the ragged black walls, showing fantastic shadows as he advanced. Not a breath of air stirred. The dismal gorge was as quiet as the grave. And finally he came to the end of it.

The cañon narrowed and ended abruptly in a hollowed-out abutment of rock forty feet high. Amos with strained face, hurried forward. And there, at the base of the wall, lay the water he sought. The tank was fully thirty feet across and the side next to him was heaped with sand. Amos uttered a hoarse yell, advanced cautiously over the sand and drank his fill. He was very thirsty and the water was cool and good. He filled his canteen.

It took him two hours to reach camp, going by the shortest route he could manage. First he made out the sleeping figures of Jake and Elwin, rolled in their blankets near the dying camp fire. Beyond them Dick and Jim stood tied. Dick, the larger, appeared plentifully filled, but Little Jim looked gaunt. The hay was gone, but Amos could tell by Jim's eyes, even in the moonlight, that the tough little horse was hungry and thirsty. Dick appeared as though nothing in the world bothered him. Amos shouted to the sleeping men.

"Wateh," he cried. "Wateh, I've found wateh."

He offered his canteen to Jake.

"Go on and let a man sleep," grumbled Elwin, from his blankets, and tumbled to the other side, gathered his blankets about his chin and dismissed the glad news with a scornful grunt.

Jake sat up and rubbed his face sleepily.

"Elwin, he finds us a-plenty water a'ready," he explained, yawning. "That feller, he's found water and was back into camp before sundown. I got here at sundown and he was here a long time a'ready."

"Good fer him," exclaimed Amos. "Where's it at?"

Jake shook his head.

"Off that way," he pointed to the east. "Elwin, he rode the gentle horse an' found water, easy."

"He rode a hoss!"

Amos thought of the tired thirsty animals that had been left in camp for a well earned rest while the men struck off in search of water. Suddenly he understood the cause of Dick's well-filled satisfaction. Elwin had taken the big horse and ridden in search of water and Dick had gone straight to it. So in a way Elwin's rash act had been rewarded, for the finding of water close to camp relieved the situation. Dick, of course, had drunk his fill and, returning to camp had eaten his own hay and gobbled Jim's, for the smaller horse had been unable to eat because of thirst.

Amos untied Jim.

"By jingo, if Dick could find wateh, you c'n, too."

Knowing Jim would not allow any one to ride, he merely headed him eastward and slapped him with an open palm. Jim dutifully started off. Amos with his empty canteen mounted Dick and followed.

Thirty minutes later Jim pulled up at a strip of damp sand lying in the shelter of a rock bluff. He pawed in the hole already scooped out by Dick and sucked at the shallow water greedily. Amos dismounted and scooped the sand aside until Jim could drink. Dick, too, drank some more. After they were satisfied Amos filled the canteen.

On the way back Amos removed Jim's halter and left him munching the grama grass that grew along the edges of the sandwash. He rode Dick back to camp and picketed him there, for he has already consumed a double-portion of hay.

In the morning the three men concluded to pack up and move to the seep Elwin had found, replenish their barrels and canteens and, if water still remained in the hole, they would camp there and prospect the district for any sign of the Frenchmen's claim or camp grounds. It seemed unlikely that any one, unless equipped with team and barrels as they were, could have followed them this far into the desert. And a day spent at the waterhole would afford a great opportunity to ascertain once for all if they were being followed. Amos did not tell of the big tank he had found, but he firmly fixed the landmarks in his mind, scanning the hills on all sides, taking into account the approaches from every direction.

They spent two days at the seep. Elwin had a small rifle along and, as there were a few quail and rabbits in the district, he managed to supply them with meat. Jake and Amos prospected the surrounding country. Once Amos made his way to the head of the narrow cañon to assure himself that the water was really there and that it was no desert hallucination. He found the pool exactly as it had been in the night. He circled the dome—his guide to the water—but nowhere was the erosion sufficient to disclose the natural rock, and there was no sign of gold or of the Frenchmen's camp.

Jake, too, did considerable walking, for his old army stride was coming back to him, but he found nothing save a few worthless samples of rock he chipped off and brought into camp in hopes of having hit upon something. In the jockey-box Amos had a small blacksmithing and horseshoeing outfit and he put new shoes on Dick who was beginning to need them. They started at daybreak on the morning of the third day at the spring, the sixth from Oro Fino, with sixty-three gallons of water. The horses took up the march willingly, heading into the southwest.

Amos, driving, let them pick the direction, but he was obliged to rein them first in one direction, then in the other, to get the buckboard around the gorges and sandwashes. Because of the difficulty of getting the buckboard through the rough country Amos estimated they did not progress more than ten miles a day, though in their windings and turnings they traveled possibly twenty.

Then there were delays for hill climbing and prospecting. Such pauses were welcomed by the horses, who needed occasional breathing spells, and by Elwin whose feet pained him very much. He suffered from the heat of the day and the chill of the nights, but the rough footing so strained the ligaments of his ankles that he complained constantly of the condition. But Elwin was blessed with a strange instinct that enabled him to retain a full knowledge of direction. He was never turned around or confused as to what direction they were traveling or in what direction lay their last night's camp. Jake insisted time and again that they were simply traveling back and forth through the maze of cliffs and tumbled mountains; he might easily have become lost when away from the wagon but for his care in noting landmarks.

They had traveled two days beyond the seep, but by conserving their water supply Amos felt they could hold out two days longer before being obliged to seek new water or return to the water-hole with the horses and kegs to replenish the supply.

They were now about seventy miles in a southwesterly direction from Oro Fino. Just after a rain there would have been plenty of water in this district, for there were numerous pot-holes. But being exposed to the sun, they were dry. Each night the men fell upon their beds utterly worn out. The horses, too, showed the effect of the long days toiling in the harness. Amos gave them the best care possible. Their oats supply was running low, and he baked each of the horses a Dutch-oven loaf of bread a day, since their supply of flour was plentiful and it helped piece out the horses' rations without occasioning hardship on the men.

THAT night they camped near the summit of a range that extended across their route, running almost east and west. The drain of the northern slope ran down into a wide sandwash which they had crossed that afternoon. The wash extended out on to the plains to the southeast and was lost in the maze of hills. The watershed of the southern side of the range fell into a huge cañon that ran east, seemingly to empty into the first, for the range flattened at the eastern end. There was some grass on these heights, and Amos left the horses grazing the next morning while he searched for a pass down into the southern valley. Elwin and Jake searched through the jumbled peaks near the camp while Amos made a wide detour over the slope, coming down into the southern wash about ten o'clock.

The wash was rougher than it had appeared from the heights. Its sides were gullied and steep; its floor a series of rocky outcroppings, cutting across the cañon like stair steps. On the sandy floor Amos found something that caused him to hurry joyously back to camp. Tired and streaked with dust he burst into camp.

"We've just the same as got it!" he shouted. "The tracks left by this buckboard are down in that wash, headin' outside. They're pretty fresh, and that means they were left by the Frenchmen when they pulled out fer Oro Fino."

Amos stood on the rim of the bluff that formed the first barrier to the southern valley. Jake and Elwin, too, looked over into the promised land that had so enthused their companion. Amos pointed eagerly as he went on.

"See, their tracks go down that big wash, headin' east. They must have followed the cañon to the foot of this range, skirted around it and turn no'th towards Oro Fino. We're 'way west of their route, but we've made a big cut-acrost, though a turrible rough one. Our hosses was headin' straight fer camp without takin' into account the sort of country they had to travel oveh. Must be wateh and grass oveh there somewheres."

Jake Appodacker inhaled a lusty chestful of the dry air and blew it out noisily between his lips as he gazed off into the prodigious maze of bad lands below.

"What a bigness," he breathed, admiration in his voice. "And Amos, you think if we goes down into that place onct we should ever get back to Oro Fino, yet?"

Jake, on the verge of the great gold find he had started out to discover, barely a week ago, was thinking of his family back at Oro Fino. He had passed the age when he could relish battling odds. Given his choice, he would have asked safe passage back to his family rather than to go on with the hazardous journey, though the prize be close at hand.

Elwin Harper leaped to his feet from the rock upon which he had sat with animation surprizing to those who had noted the languor that had characterized his movements throughout the trip.

"Let's go down and have a look around. Maybe the mine is close by. No use to drive down into that hole. Leave the camp here."

"No wateh here," Amos reminded him. "These hosses have to be where they c'n git wateh."

"Turn 'em loose," argued Elwin, "and let 'em walk to water. We don't need this crazy buckboard down there."

"But we will need it fer the trip back to Oro Fino," drawled Amos smilingly. "And we'll have to hit back by the route them Frenchmen took, down the cañon an' around the mountain. It's smootheh."

"Pah," Elwin sniffed. "Leave it here today, anyhow. Let's go down and have a look." He faced Amos angrily. "Why do you always want your own way? Why are you always trying to run this business to suit yourself? Why, why—you're hired just to handle the team. You've got no part in it. Celestine thought we needed a teamster."

For an instant animosity flamed in Amos's dark eyes. He thought of Celestine as she had stood with her mother that morning when the little party left Oro Fino, and of her solicitude toward the well-being of her father and Elwin. He could see her wide flowered skirts, the blue sash at her waist, her bright hair and the small white hand fluttering aloft. Perhaps, after all, her farewell had included only her father and Elwin. To be sure, she had hired him to go with the horses. There had been no tender word; her proposition had been businesslike. The fire died in his eyes and his shoulders sagged.

"It's taken me two hours or betteh to walk down there," Amos reminded. "It's a hard trip down and a tougher one back. Taken me more'n three hours to git up heah ag'in. It's too fur to go an' come. We c'n spare time to git the wagon down. There'll be wateh down in there somewheres."

"Whe-e-ew!" wheezed Jake again, pulling his gaze away from the gold cañon with an effort. He stared at the battered and ramshackle buckboard. "Whe-e-e-w! What a bigness."

Unable to find a pass through which they could conveniently drive they removed the wheels of the buckboard and lowered the entire outfit with ropes over the rimrock that barred their way to the chasm ahead. By a circuitous route Amos led the horses below and engineered the assembling of the buckboard and its load. They gathered up everything including the half-barrel of water that they had laboriously lowered over the cliff. With the load lashed firmly to the vehicle Amos cut two stiff *paloverde* limbs and ran them through both front and rear wheels so they would not turn. Leaving Elwin to lead the horses, Jake and Amos maneuvered the buckboard by hand down the slopes.

It was almost dark when they slithered down the last embankment and made camp in the sandy floor of the wash. They were utterly exhausted. By the light of the camp-fire Amos showed his two companions the tracks left by the Frenchmen on their last trip to Oro Fino. In the dry windless cañon the marks seemed but a few hours old. Amos pointed out the narrow marks left by the tires of the buckboard and the places where the wobbling of the right front wheel showed plainly. Then there were the large hoof-prints made by Dick at the right and Jim's smaller ones at the left.

"Oh, it's this outfit, all right," Amos assured them. "I'd know the tracks anywheres. Them Frenchmen had a camp near heah somewheres—an' near that camp'll be gold."

Jake listened eagerly to Amos's assurances. But his first remark was that little

August had been troubled with a cold when they left home and he wondered how the boy felt by this time. Colds always went hard with little August, Jake said.

Elwin was uneasy. He wanted to get out and hunt for the gold. He was impatient that the moon would not be up until after midnight. He was up at the first streak of dawn. The flames of the fire which he made awoke Jake and Amos. Never before had Elwin lent such willing service with the irksome but vital tasks of preparing the morning meal. Breakfast was over, the rig lashed for travel and they were driving up the wash before the sun rose hotly over the malapai ridges to the east.

"We betteh find the Frenchmen's camp first," Amos replied in response to Elwin's eagerness to leave the outfit where it was and strike out on a prospecting trip. "Afteh that there'll be plenty of time to hunt around fer the gold."

"Well I'm going to look for it right now, Elwin declared. "You two can drag along with this buckboard if you want to, but I'm going out through the roughs and hunt for the gold."

"All right, I guess Jake an' me c'n get the outfit to camp easy enough," agreed Amos. "You might just as well be prospectin'."

The team plodded steadily up the sandwash. Jake trudged stolidly ahead and Amos drove. Elwin with his canteen struck out into the bad lands at the right of the wash.

The buckboard, well worn to start with, was drying out in the heat of the sun. The spokes rattled and the tires were loose, the wheels dishing dangerously near the breaking point. The way was littered with rock ledges and boulders impossible to avoid. The travel became rougher. Persistently Amos and Jake pushed on up the wash, following the trail left by the previous passers-by hoping that the going would get better.

They reached a place where the trail turned out of the wash. With a hard pull the horses made the bench above. The traveling was better here. But *cholla* cactus grew so close to the trail that often the needle-sharp balls caught on the traces, and the horses stepped carefully lest the dangerous thorns strike their legs. Amos could no longer walk beside the horses, so with the lines running back over the load he walked behind, letting the team pick the way. Jake walked ahead. They progressed about a half mile in this manner, when suddenly Dick stumbled over a huge stone, strove to regain his balance, and fell across the wagon tongue, breaking it.

The *cholla* cactus grew thickly at this point and Jake, hurrying back to render assistance, and at the same time trying to avoid the sharp spines of that particularly vicious species of cactus, went too close to the floundering horse and received a terrific blow on the wrist from one of Dick's flying forefeet. An instant later Dick's head swung outward, catching the injured man under the arm. Jake was fairly lifted from his feet and flung squarely into a clump of strong healthy *cholla*.

A THOUSAND stinging needles penetrated his clothing and skin. Instinctively he gave a flop. This added to his torture. The movement covered his arms and hands with cactus balls, each bristling with hundreds of sharp little poison points. The *cholla* grew about three feet high, and the ground beneath them was strewn with the ball-shaped protruberances which had dropped off. Jake had landed fairly in the middle of a thrifty growth. He struggled to his feet. The pain from the spines was intense.

"Ach, my!" he shrieked, "Ach, my arm. My back! Ach! Them stickers is killin' me! Make quick, somebody. Help!"

Jake doubled in anguish, for the blow in the ribs he had received from Dick's head had made him sick at the stomach. His back, a mass of *cholla* balls, their points driven through his clothing into the skin, made bending a torture. But the action was involuntary and, though excruciating, wrenched numberless points from the skin. Jake shrieked hoarsely, choked and vomited. He ran ahead to a clear spot in the trail and fell on his face. In the instant, from a strong robust man, he was rendered a helpless, howling infant.

Amos had succeeded in getting Dick on his feet and the team quieted, though they saw Jake writhing in the sand and snorted. The horses feared the *chollas*, as do all desert animals which avoid the plant with utmost care. Had Jake, with his cactus balls, moved closer, they would in all likelihood have wheeled and fled up the bench only to become entangled in their own harness and meet a like fate.

Jake Appodacker had seen his share of hardship during the Civil War and he was not one to give over to cries of anguish without cause. But the kick on the wrist, the blow in his ribs and the crowning agony of the poison cactus spines broke down his self-control and he howled like a spanked child. Amos immediately set to the fearful task of removing the *cholla* balls. With a forked stick he flipped loose many of them, but hundreds of the slender barbed thorns, sharp as a yellow-jacket's sting, pulled loose from the parent balls, to be later jerked with pincers from the skin. Jake endured the ordeal as stoically as any man could under the circumstances, and Amos wondered that his yells did not bring Elwin down out of the bad lands.

The wagon tongue was broken short. Amos made a fire, straightened two horse shoes, punched holes in them and clamped one at each side of the tongue with some of the bolts with which he had provided himself before leaving Oro Fino. He wrapped it all with baling wire, taking care to pull each strand until it twanged. When he had finished the pole was stronger at that place than at any other in its length.

The task of pulling the thorns from Jake had been a tedious one. Besides, his clothing was full of them, all of which would have to be picked out with pincers one by one. Amos had been obliged to slight the job in order to make the wagon ready to move, for it was plain they could not camp there for the night. So with Jake walking behind the vehicle, steadying himself with his uninjured hand, clad only in a pair of shoes, Amos led the horses until the trail once more turned down into the sandwash.

Jake, his left arm useless and his side growing black and blue, and feeling as if a thousand barbs were still in his back, could only lie on his face in the sand. Amos built a huge fire on the bench among the *chollas* that Elwin might see, and he made a smaller one in the wash to heat water with which to bathe Jake's wounds.

Elwin came into camp before sundown, the black smoke from the burning *chollas* on the bench having led him directly to the place.

"Well, I told you not to come down here with the team," he said accusingly, when he learned of what had occurred. "You wouldn't have got into this if you'd left the things up on the ridge."

"But we'd have to come down heah sooneh or lateh," protested Amos. "We'll need the buckboard to git out of heah with. You don't seem to understand what all we're up ag'inst."

"I don't, hey," jeered Elwin. "Why, if it hadn't been for me finding that water back at the half-way place we'd never got this far. Not by a whole lot. Why, back there you'd let the water all leak out of the barrel and we were ready to die of thirst. I went out and found water that saved us. All the water we've got now is some of what I found." He sniffed. "I haven't noticed you finding any water or anything else. All you've done is to lead us off the trail over a bluff and get us into a jackpot here."

"We've got 'bout a quarteh of a bar'l left," Amos said, without a trace of resentment at the flare-up of the other. "But Jake, he says it's stale an' makes him sick. Suppose you go ahead with the suppeh an' I'll take Dick an' Jim and a keg and go hunt some more.

Amos took one of the kegs, mounted Dick and, with Little Jim following, set off up the cañon.

"Make Jake comfortable as you can," he called back. "Keep them wet cloths on his back all the time. It'll soften them spines."

Amos had not watered the horses, for he noticed that Dick seemed eager to go on, his nose was in the air and he stepped forward briskly. Amos gave him his head and they progressed almost a mile in that fashion, Jim following sedately behind, Amos balancing the empty keg across Dick's withers. He noted a place where the wagon trail turned out of the wash, but Dick did not follow it. He kept to the wash. Soon the walls closed in until there was barely room for the horses to pass. Amos was obliged to hold his legs up along Dick's neck to prevent bruising his knees against the smooth rock walls. In the opening above the narrows Amos looked ahead eagerly. But as far as he could see there was only a wide, flat bed of white sand spread over the floor of the wash. There seemed no likely place for water within miles.

A side cañon, narrow and dark, seemed to offer a much more promising outlook. Amos decided to investigate the smaller cañon for at least a mile or so in search of a pot hole. He reined Dick up. The horse pulled on the bit. Jim shoved alongside and halted inquiringly. Yet Amos felt impelled to push into the side cañon. He hauled Dick about and headed him in that direction.

Dick would hardly move. In response to Amos's heels he managed to put one fore foot before the other and inch along, but with evident distaste. Finally he stopped short. He sidled nervously, snorted and shook his head like a bronco. Amos attempted to urge him forward. Suddenly the horse whirled, reared and plunged. Amos lost his balance and went flying off his back. Dick was free and Amos sat in the sand with his keg watching the horse charge off up the sandwash at full speed.

Jim squealed and galloped after Dick. They both disappeared over a hummock of white sand, and when Amos, in hot pursuit, came within sight, the wet sand next to the bluff was flying. Dick had gone straight to a sand tank which lay between the reef of sand and the steep wall of the wide cañon. The water was nearly a foot below the surface and the whole side of the cañon appeared banked with sand a short distance away. The last place on earth to look for water.

Amos attempted to scoop out the sand with his hands, but the eager horses knocked it in faster than he could remove it. So taking Dick's bridle he left the horses pawing the wet sand and started back to camp for a shovel. When he returned almost two hours later they were still at it, for the sand ran in as fast as they could paw it out. With the shovel Amos soon made it easy for them, and as he had seen grass growing in the draws at the edges of the wash, he left them there. It was pitch dark, but he filled the keg and returned to camp with the fresh water, for the stale water of the barrel nauseated Jake.

In the morning Jake's condition was serious. He was unable to take a long breath, for the pain in his ribs was intense. His left wrist showed the black mark of Dick's shoe and the entire arm was swollen to the shoulder. The reaction on his system of the poison of the cactus spines, though only destined to last a day, seemed almost unbearable. At times he lost consciousness and babbled of his home and family. He cursed Amos roundly for having brought them upon such a journey.

"Keep a stiff uppeh lip," Amos exclaimed in a cheerful tone. "Grit yer teeth, Jake. Why, man, can't you see we're in gold cañon? We got wateh—bushels of it. The Frenchmen's camp is around some'rs. We'll find the gold."

Jake brightened noticeably.

"Little good it'll do me," he mourned in one of his sane moments. "I'm dead, mebby, a'ready." He rolled his head from side to side. "But take notice, you. If you've found that there gold mine onct, and I'm a dead man a'ready, you make sure to give Celestie her share. She gits her share and mine, too. Mind you that onct!"

"Aw, you ain't goin' to die," sympathized Amos, generously. "You'll git oveh this, all right."

Amos spent the day at Jake's side, tempering the pain with applications of cloths dipped in warm water. It was not easy work, but it was helpful. By nightfall the spines were softened and only their festering points, which in time would drop harmlessly out, remained to irritate their sorry victim. Jake's pain now centered on his injured wrist and his ribs. Elwin was absent the entire day, off in the rough country at the right of the cañon. He returned late, and did not seem so exhausted as he had been the previous day.

"Have any luck?" inquired Amos good naturedly.

"No," grumbled Elwin. "There's nothing in those blasted cañons."

BUT the following morning found Elwin eager to be on the move. He signified his intention of again prospecting in the country to the right.

"Thought you said there's nothing there?' Amos reminded him.

"Aw, I guess you don't know what a big country it is," returned Elwin. "A man could hunt around in there a year and never see all of it. I'm doing as well there as anybody. You can take the left side of the cañon and I'll stick to the right."

"Suits me," Amos agreed. "I guess I'll go on and look around a bit, up on them pinnacles to the left."

"You—you ain't gettin' ready to go off and leave me alone here, ain't you?" Jake's voice held a note of terror.

"Think we're goin' to run off and leave you?" sneered Elwin, testily.

"One of us could stay with 'im," Amos reasoned. "It'd take longer to scout out the country, but we don't want him gettin' up an' flounderin' off into the brush, unconscious-like."

"I ain't unconscious," snapped Jake.

"Well, I'm not going to stay with him—this morning, at least," retorted Elwin. "We've made a hard trip into this blasted hole to find the Frenchmen's gold mine and now that we're close to it, I intend to keep looking."

"I reckon they're ain't no such turrible hurry," argued Amos.

"No hurry? Why use your brain, man. Here we are. Our grub 's short, an' we've got a —— long trip to make before we see civilization. So I'm going to get busy. You can do as you like. I've come this far and I'm going to make hay."

Amos' eyes were on Jake's bulk, lying in the sand, a picture of despair. Poor Jake was fanning himself drearily with his tattered palm-leaf fan.

"I'll drap in about noon an' wet up them cloths fer you, Jake," he said. "Don't be skeered to stay heah. You c'n just lay in the shade." He set Jake's canteen within easy reach and his eyes rested upon Jake's swollen arm. "Now don't git out of yore head and wander off while we're gone," he counseled. "Remember, we're huntin' fer yore gold mine. We'll bring you back a nugget if we find it. C'n you remember that, old-timeh?"

"Yes," grunted Jake. "Sure. Don't go to work and get soft on me now. Just leave me here and go find that gold onct. I'm all right."

Amos took the south side of the cañon and Elwin returned toward the north, as he had the two previous days. Amos climbed a high peak and laid off the country systematically in his mind. Then he started in at a ridge that edged the big wash and followed it to the top of the range, turned and came down in the draw below it. This he did in every ridge and draw draining down into the main wash. From the heights he occasionally gazed across at the other side expecting to see Elwin toiling about among the bluffs, but he was unable to find any moving object in the tumbled maze of the opposite side of the cañon. Amos left nothing to chance in his prospecting. The country he covered was thoroughly prospected. He knew that he had not overlooked any hidden hole or ledge. He constantly scanned the ground for footprints of the Frenchmen, which they surely would have left in their going or coming to their mine or camp. He had an approximate idea as to where the Frenchmen's camp might be located, but did not go to it because of the distance it would take him from Jake, whom he intended to visit at noon.

Coming down his fourth ridge, he went into camp, prepared lunch and eased Jake to a new position in the shade of the cañon wall. Afterward he put a huge dutch-oven of beans in the coals, refilled Jake's canteen and his own and returned to his task of exploring the south side of the cañon. He made but one trip to the ridge and back when he returned to camp. Jake's condition worried him. Too, the buckboard's wheels were loose, and should Jake's condition suddenly require that they return to Oro Fino, he felt sure the wheels would fall apart on the way. So he took them off, fitted several thicknesses of strong canvas torn from the wagon sheet around the rims, heated and expanded the tires and shrunk them on over the canvas. To make the job effective and to avoid scorching the cloth he dashed water over the tires to cool them. When he had finished the spokes no longer rattled and the tires set firmly against the tough canvas that covered the rims. But he had used up the water that was in camp. So, shouldering a five-gallon keg, he started off up the wash to the water hole. There he filled the keg, caught up Dick and rode back to camp with the fresh water.

Elwin was in camp. He had eaten his supper and his unwashed dishes were standing on the end of the buckboard. A goodly portion of the baked beans were gone and he had eaten all the bread.

"I was too —— tired to bake any bread today," Elwin said, from his blankets. "I thought there was plenty in the can."

By the flare of the camp-fire Amos baked a large batch of fresh bread, also making an extra loaf for Dick and Jim.

Jake had dropped into a stupor. Amos covered him with the wagon sheet so the chill of the desert night might not strike him. Then he, too, made ready to retire.

Elwin, the following morning, exhibited none of the eagerness to be up and doing that had gripped him the previous three mornings that they had been camped in the deep sand wash. He arose late, having allowed Amos to do the breakfast cooking alone. Elwin complained of the stiffness of his limbs and of his paining feet.

"I'll stay in camp with Jake today," he announced, yawning lazily. "I'm all in. I had a head start on you, anyhow, as I prospected nearly half my side the day we moved down into this everlasting hole. There's nothing up there. I'll bet those Frenchmen just happened to strike a glory-hole in some of these riffles along this cañon. They probably worked it all out before they left and there won't be any more until after a big gully-washing rain. I imagined this would be a foozle before we started."

"Then you don't aim to go out today?" queried Amos, surprized.

"Oh, I might make a circle this afternoon," replied Elwin, "but I don't know. You said yesterday that one of us ought to stay in camp with Jake. So I guess I will. Anyway, I've done enough senseless traipsing."

"All right. I reckon that's best," Amos agreed. "I c'n go ahead an' prospect around an' see what I c'n find."

"Well, there's nothing on the north side," declared Elwin, positively. "I've been all over it and there's nothing but rocks and cactus."

Since leaving Oro Fino they had seen nothing to indicate the presence of Indians in this part of the desert. As they had pressed deeper and deeper into the country Amos had ceased to carry his rifle because of its weight and inconvenience. There seemed no occasion for vigilance such as was necessary along the wagon trail with the valuable loads which the freighters hauled, or in the more settled western districts where the Apaches were wont to swoop down for pillage and plunder. Even his wide belt and the knife was left in camp because of the heat. Amos carried only his gallon canteen.

He went up the cañon to the place where he had left off his systematic prospecting of the south side the previous day. There, instead of going on with his search he faced into the country on the north side, the side which Elwin had given up.

Amos wished first to find the camp of the Frenchmen. He clambered to the bench land above the cañon and explored its rough contour at a place not far from the water hole which Dick and Jim had shown him. A few hundred yards back from the cañon brink he found a clump of *paloverde* trees about which was evidence of human habitation.

THERE was a rude fireplace built of stones, and a mound of cold ashes near by, a few tins, pieces of cloth, leather and rope lay about. A pair of worn-out shoes, hob nailed, lay in the sun, warped until scarcely larger than baby shoes. A discarded quilt lay half buried in the drifting sand. From the limb of a tree dangled two wires, the same possibly that supported the two whisky jugs that Soto had seen. A spot where the sleek green bark of the *paloverde* had been bruised showed where the pole of the buckboard had rested, poked up into the tree to save it from the trampling of the horses. There was a faint path leading down toward the water.

Amos moved away, scanning the ground for a foot-print that might point toward the source of the Frenchmen's bonanza. Crossing a steep-banked gulch he found tracks which he was able to follow but a few yards before losing them. They were headed to the northeast. Farther on, along a clayey hog-back he found others coming in from the same direction. He moved on farther back among the bad-lands toward the northeast. Here he found a hob-nailed track, evidently made by the smaller Frenchman, which led him along a good quarter mile in the same direction. Along the way he found an occasional footprint leading either toward or from some point to the northeast. Sometimes it was but a part of a heel-mark beside a rock, again it was a plain flat-footed slide where the maker had slid down one of the numerous short steep pitches.

A few outcroppings of quartzite heavily stained with iron jutted out into a wash from the overhanging banks, quite different from the usual black and weatherstained palapai and granite. Amos searched about that point for more than an hour, thinking he must be near the goal.

He climbed a low knoll and looked back toward the main cañon. He could not see the wash because of its depth, yet from the lay of the land on the opposite slope over which he had prospected the day before, Amos could see that he was now standing at a point a little east of north from their camp in the wash. Farther east, possibly three miles, would be the slope down which they had brought the buckboard the day they lowered it over the rim. As yet he had seen no trace of tracks left by Elwin, and had the latter really prospected this side of the cañon he must certainly have left some sign of his passing. Apparently he had not progressed far from the slope down which they had entered the region. Amos abandoned attempting to follow the Frenchmen's tracks and climbed eastward, intent upon finding just how far Elwin had covered this side.

After an hour's climbing through the roughs, he skidded down into a narrow gully, where on the sandy floor were fresh tracks, enough of them to fairly form a path. Amos caught his breath with surprize. From their shape he knew they had been made by Elwin. And it was evident the other had gone up and down this one wash three or four times. The tracks led straight along, and without turning or halting or stopping to explore side cañons as might one who was prospecting in earnest.

Amos followed them up the gully until it narrowed and grew shallower until it was barely a course for the torrential rains that once or twice a year gathered and fell over the country. There the malapai took the place of the sand in the bottom, and only the marks of the nails in Elwin's shoes betrayed that he had passed that way. The gully finally dwindled near the top of a black ridge but Elwin's spoor crossed the hog-back and plunged through the rubble of the opposite side that sloped off steeply into a large wash that at this point ran almost east, parallel with the main cañon three miles below.

Amos halted on the slope and surveyed the jumbled hills. This wash seemed to have its beginnings in a huge basin at the foot of the upper rim some four or five miles farther on. Between where he stood and the basin the wash had cut a channel directly through the ridges, following some fault or ledge that had enabled it to perform that prodigious feat in ages long forgotten by the world. The slopes of its banks were dotted with sage and cactus and *paloverde*. Here and there huge knobs of rock stuck up with a heap of barren shale at their base testifying to the erosion of ages. There was not a sound. Even the breeze seemed cut off from the silent gulch. Amos suddenly became conscious of the fact that it was very warm, for it was noon. He removed his hat and mopped his brow with his sleeve. As he stood gazing at the awesome desolation spreading before him his keen eyes glimpsed a bit of cloth farther down the slope. It was an empty tobacco sack that he recognized as having been Elwin's.

It was but an empty tobacco sack, thrown carelessly down when the last grain of tobacco had been shaken from it. But it brought Amos abruptly to the business in hand. Had Elwin formed this path? What occasion had brought him over this same route several times when he was supposedly prospecting hither and yon among these tumbled hills where only by chance does a man cross his own path, much less follow it as if to a certain destination. He plunged on down the slope, following the easily traced footprints.

In the big wash the path went directly up its floor. A mile farther on the stone beneath the sand came close to the surface and there were tiny depressions filled with sand in the midst of an expanse of bare rock.

Traversing a rocky declevity, Amos came suddenly upon a gold-pan, such as used by placer miners, lying upside down on a great flat stone at the side of the wash. A short handled shovel was thrust in a crevice. Both were polished with use. Farther up the slope lay a rusted canteen and a pick. None of these tools belonged with his own outfit. Amos examined the gold-pan curiously. Piled near-by was a heap of quartz galena specimens, many of them rounded, showing that they had been washed some distance. But they had not been piled there recently. But all about the floor of the wash was plentiful evidence of recent placer operations carried on in a hurried and wasteful manner.

Here and there, wherever a depression in the bed-rock had held gravel, the cavity had been scooped out with the shovel and the gravel presumably settled in the gold-pan until the particles of gold contained in the collection had been disclosed. Amos wondered how plentiful the gold could be to warrant such a method of recovering it. Seizing the pan and the shovel he hurried on until he came to a crevice that had been overlooked.

First, he shoveled off the fine sand that lay like drifted snow on top of the heavier stuff. Then he carefully raked aside some of the top coating of heavier gravel. When barely two inches of coarse gravel covered the rock bottom of the small hollow, he scraped up a panful with his hands. Shaking and rocking the pan he jostled the contents until the heavier pieces settled to the bottom. Removing a portion from the top he repeated the operation until he had concentrated only the largest and heaviest pieces in the bottom of the pan. These he stirred with his finger.

Among the coarse pieces of gravel were fragments of lead, a string of black iron sand and a dozen nuggets of gold. Two of them were large, worth possibly four dollars each, the others ranged downward in size until the smaller ones were about the size of a wheat grain. Smaller particles showed in the black sand, and this Amos poured out into his hat. Then he set off eagerly in search of another riffle that had not been disturbed. When he found one it yielded fully as rich a store as had the first.

Here was a bonanza. Small wonder the Frenchmen had taken out more gold than they knew what to do with. Amos hurriedly panned out the riffle, dumped the nuggets and dust into his hat and ran on in search of another pocket. Here in the bad lands of the cañon side was hidden a golden store beyond the wildest dreams of man. From whence it came, or from what rich lode it had been broken off and washed down did not concern Amos as he frantically shoveled gravel and tossed it in the pan, shook it down, and clawed for the golden hoard. His hat grew heavy, the brim sagged and buckled with the load as he hurried from place to place. He worked bareheaded in the sun, perspiration falling unnoticed from his face. The sun suddenly seemed to drop behind the frowning black escarpment at the west. Amos set the pan down and looked about in surprize. He had no idea that it was so late.

Picking up his burdened hat he got to his feet. He was weak from his labor, and very thirsty. He started down the water course to find his canteen where he had left it upon first discovering the place. It was much farther to it than he had expected. He wet his hair and splashed a little water on his face, then drank. Clutching his hat he set off at a good clip to follow the route by which he had entered the place. Down the large cañon, over the hog-back and into the gully where first he had seen Elwin's tracks. He hurried on, eager to tell of his find.

When he reached camp he found it deserted. The wagon was gone, the ashes cold. The barrel lay on its side in the sand. Two pallets, his own and Jake's, lay in their accustomed places. The dutch-oven rested in squat innocence in the lea of a large rock. Near it were the coffee pot and the tin in which they kept their bread. A trail left by the buckboard wheels vanished in the darkness down the draw. Amos lifted the lid of the dutch-oven and peered within. It was half full of baked beans. The coffee pot contained about a quart of cold coffee. Two round loaves of bread baked that morning were in the tin, wrapped in a flour sack just as Amos had left them. On a rock near-by lay Jake's palm-leaf fan, weighted down with a small stone; his cap, too, was tossed upon his blankets.

Amos was tired, and he had eaten nothing since leaving camp that morning. He wanted nothing so much as to eat and lie down in his blankets for a good night's rest. But the situation confronting him demanded something more. He was puzzled. Either occasion had arisen in his absence that required Jake and Elwin to use the wagon or else something menacing was in the air. There grew upon Amos a suspicion that possibly Elwin, who he was sure had discovered the Frenchmen's gold supply on the first day of their coming into the gorge, might have revealed his secret to Jake and persuaded the older man to accompany him, leaving Amos to get out of the desert as best he could. Still, one of them might have fallen from some bluff farther down the cañon and the other had gone to his rescue with the wagon. Amos walked down the sandy floor of the cañon following the tracks.

AMOS' hat, with its precious hoard, was left forgotten in camp as he strode off down the wash. He had gone almost a mile before he remembered it, and then another matter demanded his attention. For just ahead he had heard the crunch of gravel. He had halted and, moving to the side wall, waited there. Some one was coming up the wash. The steady tread sounding on the sand, occasionally there was the rasping clatter as the shoe struck a stone.

Presently a figure came into view advancing through the gathering gloom of the cañon. As it approached, Amos recognized the form of Jake Appodacker, bareheaded and carrying the hard-kicking Spencer carbine. At once Amos began to whistle cheerily, for he felt certain if he was to show himself suddenly Jake would brave the recoil of his weapon and investigate the remains afterward.

"Ho, it's you is it, Amos?" Jake called out in a relieved tone. But he halted, his gun ready. "Is it you onct, Amos?"

"Yeh, it's me. What's up?"

Jake resumed his advance.

"Something must have happened to Elwin, a'ready," he explained as he came abreast. "He went off early this morning to get the hay and he didn't came back yet."

"Hay? What hay?" demanded Amos. Now sure of a trick. "Tell me about it."

"Well didn't you told him to go get some hay onct?" challenged Jake. "No sooner had you gone a'ready this morning than Elwin went off and filled the other keg and brought the horses in, so. He said you told him to go down the wash and cut some grass for the horses and haul it to camp onct."

"I neveh told him to haul any hay," broke in Amos. "Those hosses was gitting along fine up where they was. He's lit out! Gone!"

"Gone?" echoed Jake. "Go-o-one!" His voice was hoarse with despair. "Ach, and I thought it might be some such trick in it."

Jake's melancholy eyes sagged dolefully.

"And I—I helped him hitch up. Ach, idjit I am. He took the two kegs and—went! Was I blind at him whatever."

Jake gripped his carbine and stared blankly back the way he had come, his injured arm swinging restlessly.

"He got a ten-hour head start," Amos reminded him quietly. "Don't git excited heah now. We got a-plenty wateh an' I know where there's a big pool half-way home. Come on back to camp."

At the camp Amos built a fire and by its light showed to Jake the gold dust and nuggets in his hat. He explained how he had found the place and told of his suspicion that part of the cargo now in the buckboard with Elwin was fifty pounds or so of gold.

"It's gold onct!" Jake gasped and stared at the heap in Amos's hat, scarcely listening to what the other said. "It's gold, whatever!" He fingered the nuggets and stirred the heavy pellets with his fingers. "Ain't it wonderful?" he said in awed tones. "All this gold. And we can come ag'in whenever we want. Ach, my. Such a happiness on me I ain't never had since I was born a'ready."

"Elwin just about cleaned her up," Amos explained. "I just found some pockets him an' the Frenchmen had passed up. But a rain er two'll fill her up ag'in. It's just like a turrible big sluice-box up there, worked by wind an' rain. But in dry weatheh a man might as well blow his brains out with a revolveh as to try to come up heah when the holes are dry. Nor would anybody find it unless they stumbled on to it by jest plain bull luck."

Amos busied himself with the problem of how they were to get themselves out of their own predicament. One thing was certain. They were practically without food and, if they were to reach Oro Fino, the start must be made immediately. His knife had gone with the buckboard, as had all their arms and ammunition save Jake's carbine and the six cartridges it carried. He tore a wide band of cloth from a blanket, doubled it, and dumped the gold from his hat into it and made a bundle with a strip for the shoulder. The coffee pot, being a camp utensil, had a bail like a bucket. He filled it with water from his canteen. Taking Jake's canteen and his own, he made the trip up to the water-hole where he filled them both.

Although three full days had elapsed since Jake's injury, he was still in poor shape for travel. The pain of the cactus spines had abated somewhat, but his side protested against a full breath and the swelling of his arm had not lessened. But to be on the move was imperative. For, without food, they soon would be trapped in the desert. So they started.

They toiled up the slope to the north in the darkness. Amos went ahead carrying in one hand the dutch-oven and the bread; in the other the coffee pot and Jake's carbine. Across his shoulders was slung his canteen and the bundle of gold. Jake followed with his own canteen. It was dawn before they reached the rim upon which they had camped the night before entering the southern valley.

Amos was going as directly as possible toward the water he had found on their third day out from Oro Fino. It had required two days to bring the buckboard as far as the rim, but he judged that if nothing occured to impede their slow progress they might reach the water in half the time. They kept on until almost noon, when Jake, wearied beyond all endurance, begged to rest. They ate one of the loaves and a portion of the beans. Amos made one huge sandwich of the remainder and threw aside the dutch-oven. Unless they found game that the carbine could bring down without shattering the victim beyond recognition, the sandwich was all that stood between them and starvation on the remainder of the trip to Oro Fino.

"We may be able to head off Elwin at the seep," Amos told Jake. "He'll head for there soon's he gits around the mounting. He don't know about ary otheh wateh hole. An' if the seep's dry—" Amos shook his head soberly—"them pore hosses!"

They were walking again within four hours. Climbing, sliding, climbing. Darkness found them within a mile of the brink of the water cañon, but in a terrain so precipitous that further attempt at progress was exceedingly hazardous. Both were fatigued to a point of collapse, for, since they had started twenty-four hours before, they had only the water they carried and the one lunch of bread and beans. Amos had drained the last drop from his canteen shortly after noon and Jake, although he had consumed the contents of the coffee pot as well as the water in his own canteen, had been without water for as long. Jake's tongue was thick with thirst. He could scarcely articulate. His eyes were ghastly orbs of dejection. His injuries throbbed with fever. Accustomed only to the soft security of his store, Jake felt that he was entering the farthest reaches of Gehenna.

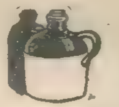
"I can't go on," he moaned as they stumbled among the rough malapai rocks in the darkness, "ach, I can't go on. You go along. I—I'm done for a'ready."

"We'll wait right heah fer daylight," declared Amos.

Neither attempted to gather wood for a fire. They fell into uneasy slumber.

At dawn they were climbing down toward the cañon in which was the pool. Jake stumbled along blindly, clutching Amos' shoulder for support. It seemed they would never reach the cañon floor.

They had been without food or water for eighteen hours when finally they reached the pool at the base of the cañon's end. It was almost eight o'clock in the morning, the sun was not yet in the cañon depths. Both of them floundered crazily over the sand bank and lay head downward, gulping the cool water. Both thought it would kill them, but neither could bring himself to remove his parched lips from the refreshing draught. For long minutes they drank deeply, as if the cool liquid were a revitalizing but never-satiating nectar.



THE chill water caused them both to shiver. They went back down the cañon to a patch of sunlight that warmed the sand. There they dropped to rest, and there their abused stomachs revolted and regurgitated. Amos was the first to recover. He knew that they needed food. He looked at the one sandwich that he carried wrapped in the flour sack. His mouth watered and his stomach ached with emptiness.

"Heah, Jake," he said, nudging the half-unconscious form of his companion. "Git back outa the sun. You'll bake. Set in the shade, an' eat some of this heah sandwich. Don't gobble it all, fer it's got to last you a day or two longeh. I'm a-goin' down to the seep an' see if I can't ketch Elwin there with the hosses. You can't walk to Oro Fino. So you stay right heah an' wait till I git back, even if I'm gone a week. You wait for me, savvy? Now will you?"

"I have afraid," apologized Jake weakly. "You won't—won't be goin' long? You'll be comin' back quick a'ready, ain't you?"

"I'll git back quick's I c'n," promised Amos. "See, I'm a-leavin' the gold heah." He placed it among the stones of the cañon wall at a place high above his head. "Now here's yore gun. You watch the wateh hole. Every rabbit an' quail in this country'll have to come heah to drink. If you only git a rabbit or two it'll save yore life. You c'n roast 'em on a stick." He set the carbine against a rock. "Now, Jake, you remembeh this: They's wateh heah, an' game, but they ain't *none nowhere else!* You wait heah till I git back."

"Well, I ain't a-goin' to stay here till I starve dead," grumbled Jake in a faint voice. "That much I give you now."

Amos struck down the cañon to head off Elwin at the seep where they had camped on the trip out. It was ten o'clock when he neared the seep and stole in cautiously. He wished to surprize Elwin if he was there, and to overpower him if necessary.

But Elwin had come and gone with the team. Amos looked about vainly in search of something to eat, for there was evidence that Elwin had prepared a meal there. The horses had been tied to a tree. The tie-ropes were hanging there, mute evidence. Amos examined their tracks and found that they had left camp at a trot.

Elwin had evidently watered the horses, for he had made several trips from the buckboard to the seep, and the sand had been freshly shoveled out. The sand was damp, but Elwin had drained it of its contents almost to the last drop. One of the water kegs lay empty near-by, showing that he had been unable to secure enough water to fill more than one of them.

Amos carried the canteen that he had filled that morning at the pool in the cañon, and he faced toward Oro Fino, forty-nine miles away. To reach it meant at least fifteen hours of walking if he did not halt to rest. Amos doubted if he could hold out that long, for he was weak for lack of food. He thought of Jake back there in the cañon with the sandwich, depending upon him for aid. Jake could never make the trip to Oro Fino on foot, and there was a possibility of overtaking Elwin and the team. So Amos took up the trail.

About fifteen miles farther on he came to another camping place. Night must have overtaken Elwin here. In all likelihood he had passed the seep about sundown of the evening before and pressed on this much farther before darkness forced a halt.

The ground beneath the tree where he had tied the horses was stamped to a powder. Plainly the team had stood there all night hitched to the tree, without food or water.

The lash rope, with many knots in it, still dangled from the tree as Elwin had left it. From here on Dick and Jim had struck a furious pace. Without the lash rope almost everything fell from the buckboard as it jolted along. The road was strewn with supplies—ammunition, their guns, Amos' belt and knife, the remaining flour, grain and cornmeal. The provision box had been smashed on a rock in its fall. Amos pounced upon it greedily. He bolted slice after slice of raw bacon and dried beef. He knew it was a foolish thing to do, but was utterly unable to resist the clamorings of his stomach. The food was salty and increased his thirst.

The buckboard was running light now and the horses kept a stiff gait. Amos wondered dully what was holding the water keg and the canvas wagon sheet in the buckboard, for he had found neither along the trail. The heat set his head pounding. His knees seemed about to refuse to bear his weight any longer. He suffered spells of dizziness. Ten miles farther on he drank the last drop of water in his canteen, carried it a while, then cast it aside.

Night overtook him and he lost the trail of the buckboard but pushed on grimly toward the mountains in which nestled Oro Fino. Had he been less inured to hardship he would have faltered and perished. But he fixed his mind upon Oro Fino and forced his benumbed limbs to keep up their steady rise and fall. He knew that, once he lost his great determination to reach his objective, there would be no bringing of his mind back to its normal function and he would wander aimlessly across the desert as had men before him whom the waste places had swallowed up.

He thought he was walking swiftly. He broke off twigs of greasewood and chewed them to keep moisture in his mouth, but his cheeks drew dry and his tongue thick. But sunrise found him toiling at a snail's pace into Oro Fino. His coming had been heralded and already Dave Lankford, the old Indian-fighter whom Jake Appodacker had employed to act as watchman at the store, had taken charge. He was supporting the young swamper and piloting him as speedily as possible toward the privacy of Jake's general store. For a crowd, eager to learn of the Frenchmen's bonanza, had gathered and were questioning Amos.

"Did yuh fin' th' Frenchmen's diggin's?"

"Where are Jake and that young Elwin?"

"Where's yer team?"

"Didja bring enny nugguts?"

Dave Lankford leaned close to Amos' ear as he shoved him along.

"Don't ye say a word," he hissed.

He addressed the crowd:

"This feller left hyar with Jake Appodacker an' a kid named Elwin. I'll bet they're both dead. This lad's durn near it, hisself. But don't let thet old lady Appodacker git wind o' this er she'll holler her dad blamed head off. Might be Jake's still alive some'rs. He's a tough ol' rooster ef I'm any jedge. Here's a dollar, Al, bring a bucket o' hot soup to Jake's store. This young feller needs bolsterin' up. Couple ye fellers give me a hand, we'll pack 'im th' rest o' th' way."

By keeping up his running fire of conversation Lankford managed to get Amos into Jake's store and the door shut on the crowd before they had opportunity to question him further. Once alone with the desert dazed youth he set to giving him cool water, a spoonful at a time.

"Whar'd ye leave th' team?" Lankford questioned after a while.

"Team?" gulped Amos thickly. "Ain't the team heah yet?"

"Nope. Nothin' hyar but yerself. Whar's Jake an' Elwin?"

Amos' brain whirled. How could he, with such slow passage, have arrived in Oro Fino ahead of the team? Could he have mistaken the trail? Could it be possible Elwin was still at gold cañon, and had not left them, after all? But no. He remembered the drained seep, the ropes left hanging in the *paloverdes* and the things that had fallen from the buckboard.

"Elwin—" he mumbled, "—them pore hosses."

"Where was th' last ye seen 'em?"

"Elwin ran off with the team," Amos managed.

"Which way'd he run?"

"To Oro Fino."

"Ye're crazy as a b'iled owl," commented Lankford.

WITHIN thirty minutes after Amos' arrival Mrs. Appodacker had heard all about it and hastened tearfully to the store. With her came Celestine, a flutter of youth and beauty in a crisp summery dress with a blue sash that matched the melting blue of her eyes. But her face was solemn with concern as to the whereabouts of her father. She attempted to calm her mother. But it took all Celestine's persuasion and all of Lankford's diplomacy, gained through long experience in dealing with Indians, and not a little threatening, to prevent Mamma Appodacker from awakening the exhausted young Southerner to demand an explanation.

Amos slept two hours after he had taken the hot food and crackers doled out sparingly by his hard fisted nurse. And for the entire time Mamma Appodacker burdened Celestine with a doleful account of how Amos must have abandoned Jake and Elwin to the bared claws of the desert and somehow managed to make his own escape, leaving the others to perish horribly. Possibly he had murdered his companions in their beds, or had committed some other desperate deed equally vile. Whatever the hypothesis that mamma began on, the result was always the same—Amos had saved himself and left the other two to their fate. Mamma's blood pressure rose and her choler deepened each time she glanced at the young swamper's face. It was not a pretty object, Amos' face, grimed with desert dust beneath a flourishing, fifteen-day growth of whiskers. His eyes hung half-closed, sheepishly, and his sun-blistered lips, swollen and cracked, puffed with each heavy exhalation of his regular breathing. Dave Lankford had placed his hat over Amos' head to keep off the bright daylight and it added a resemblance to a corpse.

All of mamma's fears and suspicions were submitted to Celestine with the understanding that they be instantly accepted and ratified. Celestine nodded occasionally and wiped a tear from her eyes at each harrowing account of her father's demise. A constant hum of doleful prophecies issued from mamma's corner, and if Amos could have been tried on the argument and evidence presented by Mamma Appodacker at that time, he could have been executed where he lay, and the world well rid of a most grievous ruffian.

"He's awake a'ready!" exclaimed mamma triumphantly, as Amos' lids flickered half-open, revealing a pair of bloodshot, blinking eyes. "Hah! What have you done to my Jake, now," she demanded threateningly. "Where is my Jake onct? Answer me up now."

Amos sat up and reached for the canteen. Dave Lankford, the watchful old nurse, switched it away and gave him a ladle of the soup which he was keeping hot on the store stove, and held out a fistful of crackers from the wooden cracker-box. Mamma Appodacker, supported by Celestine, had moved to the counter upon which Amos lay.

"What did you done with my Jake," fired in mamma.

"I—left 'im—out—"

"Ach! Ach, my!" howled Mamma. "Left 'im! Hear, now, Celestine. He's gone and left papa to die. Ach! Ach! Ach!"

"He didn't finish," Celestine objected intensely. She turned to Amos. "Go on," she commanded. "Where is papa? And Elwin?"

"They was—uh—" Amos' confused brain sought to straighten out the tangle without telling Celestine of Elwin's treachery. "Uh, Elwin—last I seen of 'im—" Amos brought himself together with an effort and swung his feet off the counter and sat up straighter. "Elwin—uh, the team ran away with 'im. That's it. I'm a-lookin' for Elwin an' the team."

"Hear 'im now," wailed mamma. "He's let the team up and run off with papa and Elwin a'ready. To know that wouldn't take no dummy head. Ach! Ach, my!"

She plumped down upon a bale of blankets, and gave way to grief for her husband whom she practically knew was lost to her forever.

"Y'u wimmen'd drive a man crazy!" ejaculated Dave Lankford. "Dang ut, what difference does it make ef he is dead? Gotta die some day."

Mamma shrieked at the old Indian-fighter's bloodthirstiness, and sobbed the harder.

Celestine's eyes rested accusingly upon him, then turned to Amos.

"But you were to have charge of the team," she reminded him. "How did you happen to let Elwin be driving them?"

"Oh, he—he was just—just drivin' around, while I was away."

"Away?"

"Yeah, away from camp."

"But you were to look after the horses all the time."

Amos shook his head dumbly. He staggered to his feet and stood steadying himself against the counter.

"I got to git right back. There's Jake, back there, waitin' fer me."

"See?" crowed Lankford, shrilly. "Hear thet? He says Jake's a-waitin' back thar some'ers. Where'bouts is he at, kid?"

Amos eyed the old man with suspicion. To reveal Jake's whereabouts or to mention the fact that there was a pool of water in the desert cañon would result in a stampede that might result in the loss of the Frenchmen's secret.

"I c'n find 'im," he replied firmly, "but I gotta git a team an' rig. I gotta go git Jake."

Even as he had held to his purpose of reaching Oro Fino, he now clung to his determination to start back immediately for Jake Appodacker.

"Better let me go along," advised Lankford. "Ye're crazy as a lizard." He motioned them all to the door. "I'm goin' t' help 'im git a rig," he explained. An' I got ter lock up hyar."

CELESTINE put on her blue sunbonnet which she had carried out of the store, and tied the strings under her chin with a determination that warned her mother she had come to some pronounced conclusion.

"What now, Celestine," demanded Mamma Appodacker through her tears.

"I am going along."

Mamma Appodacker opened her mouth. Unbelief, alarm, dismay were stamped upon her motherly countenance. But for once she found no words with which to express her horror at such conduct.

"But with papa out there—and Elwin," Celestine headed off the voluble protest that was forming behind mamma's amazed eyes. "I can help take care of them. I—I couldn't stay here—and just wait."

Driving two good mules attached to a two-seated surrey, they set out to bring Jake Appodacker back to Oro Fino. Amos was driving. At his side, erect and aloof, sat Celestine, her eyes staring straight ahead toward the shimmering purple hills where Amos assured her Jake awaited them. In the rear seat, flanked by two bales of hay, a sack of grain, a basket of food and two water kegs, sprawled the old Indian-fighter, his favorite weapon, a 40-90 Sharps single shot, the most powerful gun of its day across his bony knees.

Amos determined to reveal to no one the secret of the pool in the cañon, but to drive to the seep and leave the rig there while he went up in the cañon after Jake. He would trust neither Lankford nor Celestine with the knowledge of that water hole, for in it lay the key to the Frenchmen's gold. Should Elwin somehow have managed to make his way out of the desert with his knowledge of the location of the Frenchmen's bonanza, it was certain he could not return to it as long as the seep remained dry, for that was the only water he knew of. Before it rained again Amos meant to have Jake properly stake and record the claims as his own, and his only assurance of being able to accomplish his purpose lay in concealing the secret of the water in the cañon.

Dick and Jim, the desert team, gaunt and famished for water, dragged wearily into Oro Fino with the empty buckboard three hours after Amos, Celestine and Dave Lankford had disappeared into the parched maze to the south. Pete Davila, boss teamster of the mining company's corrals, took the poor animals in charge. Mamma Appodacker heard about it and came down to look at them and renew her conviction that her husband had met with foul play at the hands of the young swamper.

The day dragged to a close. Mamma Appodacker went to her home where she was surrounded by sympathetic wives whom she directed in the preparation of the evening meal for the four little Appodackers when they came home from school. The kind ministrations of her neighbors only served to intensify her grief. It was so like the sympathetic services offered to bereaved families.

All night a light burned in the Appodacker home. Every moment Mamma Appodacker expected them to bring Jake in on a stretcher. She said as much, and from time to time went out on the high narrow porch and scanned the pathway or the gulch street below expectantly. The women of the neighborhood mourned with her in relays.

Morning dawned, the sun rose, and Mamma Appodacker, her sympathizers worn out and gone home, prepared breakfast, and got the children off to school. She expected Amos to return with Jake and awaited their coming anxiously. She did not stop to consider that Jake had been left in a desert cañon more than sixty miles away, and the best that could be expected of the rescue party would be a round-trip in thirty-six hours. But the whole town virtually turned its face to the south, wondering what the returning surrey would reveal.

The day wore on, the afternoon shadows lengthened, the heat increased. The stage, returning from the railway, rattled down the grade and along the gulch street to the stage station opposite the Grand Central Hotel. The driver cleared up the mystery of the driverless buckboard.

"I pulled out o' hyar at sun-up yistiddy mawnin'," related the stage driver, who by virtue of his contact with the outer world was the principal source of news in that isolated community. " 'Bout nineteen mile east o' hyar, I comes up to that buckbo'd an' team. Hit war 'bout nine o'clock. Thet kid, Elwin, whut ust ter work in Jake Appodacker's war a-settin' in th' seat. He stopped me an' handed me two o' th' dangdest nuggits I ever see. Look hyar—"

The stage driver hitched up his belt, leaned to one side and ran his raw-boned sun-browned hand into his overalls pocket. Then he drew his hand forth, exhibiting in the grimy palm two gleaming lumps of gold.

"Th' kid ast me ef I'd haul 'im in ter th' railro'd. I says I shore will ef yuh'll give me another nuggit fer ter pay yer fare ter th' stage comp'ny. An' he shore done it. I c'd got some mo' ef I'd thought quick enough.

"He had sumpin rolled up in a wagon sheet. Hit warn't bigger'n a brick-bat, much, but hit shore was hefty. Weighed fifty pounds er so. I knowed whut hit war soon's I seen it, but I didn't say nothin' fer I had them two furrin' miners abo'd an' a backleg gambler whut looked like he wouldn't stop at nothin' that'd assay a dollar. An' they was a cigar drummer, too, whut didn't look much greedier'n a she grizzly after a hard winter. So I jest throwed th' kid's lump inter th' boot an' he got in. I knowed his team an' was plumb shore they'd come on ter camp. I ast 'im whar his partners was. He said they'd left 'im an' gon ter Oro Fino afoot. I thought that was funny, all right, but didn't have no cause ter dispute 'im."

The stage driver looked a long time at the nuggets in his hand and put them back into his pocket. He chuckled.

"Thet kid just naturally thought he had all th' money in th' worl'. The closter we got to th' railro'd, th' exciteder he got. He bought a ticket ter 'Frisco. He had ter pay fer it with nuggits, an' th' express agent talked 'im inter sending along th' bundle by express. The whole batch weighed 'bout sixteen thousan' doll'rs. An' yuh all knows how long a stake like that'd last a kid in 'Frisco. 'Specially a kid out o' this blame desert thinkin' he's got a million in pure gold an' aimin' ter buy out th' town—" The stage driver chuckled again, and let his mules start toward the corral. "I'll bet he goes broke flatter'n a shovel in two weeks."

FAR out in the shimmering wastes a dust-cloud crept toward Oro Fino. Almost hidden in it was a two-seated surrey drawn by two mules, toiling on the last lap of the journey back to the settlement.

Dave Lankford occupied the driver's seat, his capable hands idly flecking the lines over the mules' backs. Jake Appodacker, sore of arm and side and back, but rejoicing over the wonderful luck he'd had, sat in the front seat with the driver. In his lap he held the blanket in which Amos had dumped the gold nuggets back at the camp in gold cañon. From time to time Jake fingered the gleaming tokens. He was in high spirits.

"Here now, Mister Lankford," he was saying, "let me give you some more of these nuggits. I should guess two dollars a night ain't enough for me to be paying a night watchman like you anyhow. Especially when he watches out an' taken in my partner when he comes onct to town into, crazy with the heat like my Amos did a'ready.

"It's plain on the surface, Mister Lankford, that if anybody elts have got holts of him he'd never got back to me without a bunch of them there Oro Fino cutthroats knowing about the mine. Here's mebby four t'ousand doll'rs worth, you say, of gold nuggits. Just think about it onct! Amos, he picked 'em up easy at the Frencher's mine in one day a'ready. Think about it, then!" Jake exclaimed. "And what d'you sippose mamma'll say onct when she sees it all?"

Jake had asked that last question a dozen times. Celestine who sat in the rear seat beside Amos, had dutifully replied each time that in her opinion mamma would like it just fine. But this time she did not reply. The rear seat was silent as a tomb. Jake repeated the question, twisting about in the seat and raising his voice—

"What d'you sippose mamma'll say onct—"

Jake's voice trailed off unintelligibly. Over his face spread a blank look of amazement.

For in the rear seat, not three feet behind his own broad back and the gaunt form of the old Indian-fighter, sat Celestine and Amos, each with an arm about the other, their free hands clasped—sound asleep.

Jake yanked his bulk about until he faced properly forward. He met Dave Lankford's sly glance with a grin.

"Well, I should guess he's a fine feller for Celestine to get," Jake said in a low voice lest he disturb the slumbering pair in the rear seat. "She's downright lucky onct."

Lankford grinned approvingly and drove carefully to avoid a large stone that heretofore he would have driven over without regard.

The late afternoon sun slanted in under the fringed top of the surrey, and Lankford let the mules rest while he put down the side curtain that shaded the rear seat. Then he drove on, the mules' ears moving waggishly to their leisurely gait. They would reach Oro Fino before dark.

Dust, white with alkali, rose and settled alike over the mules and the occupants of the equipage. The two men in the front seat kept their faces honorably toward the destination, although they grinned when they exchanged glances.

And in the rear seat Amos and Celestine slept peacefully. Dust from the mules' hoofs and the slowly turning wheels of the surrey sifted in and settled warmly over them until Celestine's starched skirt, blue sash and ironed sunbonnet were as gray as Amos' faded jeans, streaked shirt and wide-brimmed sombrero.

Slants on LIFE

by Bill Adams

RETROSPECT

IN LOOKING backward over life I sometimes see much of sadness, and feel life to be a rather sorrowful thing; but far far oftener it is the laughter that I hear, and it is smiling faces that look into mine. Even men who were hateful, even the memories of merciless drivers, are softened for the reason that time effaces their evil, bringing out more and more whatever of pleasantness they had in them. There were very very few indeed who *meant* the evil. At any rate, time shall give them the benefit of the doubt.

Judgment is a poor thing as from man toward man, isn't it? Though I have known human devils, for whom in my heart I can find no respect or love, perhaps the Almighty can. I do not doubt that such is the case, and to Him I will leave the judgments.

THE CAMP-FIRE
A Free-to-All Meeting-Place For Readers Writers and Adventurers

Our Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.

We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The *spirit* of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.

Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of leaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

A REAL "lost mine" back of "Hidden Dollars" by Romaine H. Lowdermilk, but somehow or other Mr. Lowdermilk, who has the "dope" for finding it, isn't making the attempt. No, he doesn't offer the real map to anybody. These "lost mines" are very nice, but actually getting said gold isn't so soft.

Wickenburg, Arizona.

I wonder if there are any *Adventure* readers who never heard of a "lost" mine or who never had the location of some hidden store of gold enthusiastically described to them and pointed out on the soiled face of a much-thumbed map? There are plenty of such "lost" gold hoards, whether actual or imaginary. Westerners don't pay much attention to the wild tales about these rich deposits that could be so easily relocated if only somebody would put up a few thousand to finance the search.

So it is with my story in this issue. The hardships encountered on this trip by *Swamper Hotfield* and his party were related to me by William Albert Clark well known in the 80's at Tucson and along the Gila. Mr. Clark died some time ago but in the hey-day of his vigorous manhood he, with M. L. Grover, a veritable Hercules, ventured into a certain desert region of Southwestern Arizona from "Oro Fino" and actually discovered a deposit of fabulously rich gold. They brought out samples to prove their find. Lack of rainfall prohibited another trip at that time. For two years they waited for it to rain and when rain finally occurred they went into the desert from the opposite side, thinking to save travel and hardship. They knew exactly where the gold lay—they thought—but after two months' search they were forced out by the summer heat. Determined to try again but lacking funds, Clark went to Mexico in the employ of a mining company and earned the money to outfit Grover who went again into the desert with a man named Wrye, who, just before they reached the gold location, went insane or else found the gold and tried to get away with the secret. Anyway Wrye took the team and buckboard and drove away leaving Grover without food or water in the depth of the wilderness. Any man less a giant than Grover would have perished. Escape was well nigh impossible, but Grover got to the Colorado River in time to save himself, though the experience nearly ruined him physically.

Clark, by this time, had made a considerable fortune by the sale and lease of mining properties which he had acquired in many years of dealing with prospects. He always wanted to go back to seek the wonderful find over the route by which they had found it the first time but ill health and the possession of considerable wealth made him put it off.

That was before the day of the motor-truck. Clark told me the exact location of the find, wrote down the description of the trip and lay of the land in such a way as it seems perfectly clear as to how the hidden gold could be found—provided a man had two good motor-trucks, a good motor-car and plenty of patience. With these vehicles food and water could be transported, bases of supply established and a thorough search made. At the time of his death Mr. Clark was absolutely certain that the gold was there in large quantities, for he was a mining man of experience, not easily fooled—*and he had seen the gold and brought out samples!*

Some day, perhaps, a great gold discovery will be made in the vicinity indicated by Clark in his description. I shall compare maps and if it really is Clark's one-time "glory-hole" I will be glad. For then will I know there's no use of my risking my own neck to find it, a thing which at times I am tempted to do. The map used in connection with this story is in no wise an accurate one. "That much," as *Jake Appodacker* would say, "I give you."—ROMAINE H. LOWDERMILK.

* * *

SOMETHING from L. Patrick Greene, formerly of our editorial staff, now of our writers' brigade, concerning his story in this issue.

"The Drift,"
Marlow-on-Thames,
Bucks., England

After three years of sitting very close to the Camp-Fire and keeping very warm, but saying nothing—because I was a minor host of the fire, so to speak, and it would be very bad form for a host to butt in on the guests' conversation—I now find myself a very material ocean away, but free to talk. And how I love to talk—don't I, A. S. H.?

JUST the same, I'm not so sure I like it. It's cold over here and there are so many fellows crowding around the fire. There seems only one thing to do and that: Borrow a burning log or two from the big fire and start a camp-fire of my own. In other words: If my house had a number—and it seems to be bad form to have a number over here—it would be 71. By golly, it *is* 71 and, brother adventurers, you all know what that means.

The *mondjo* ordeal described in "The Blindness of the Heathen" is—according to Father Junod of the Swiss Romande Mission—the supreme means for unmasking *bayloi*, the evil wizards, the eaters of human flesh, and is practised by the majority of Bantu tribes.

The *mondjo* is a plant which possesses highly intoxicating properties. With it a special magician prepares a beverage which acts as a means of revelation; and can be resorted to by any individual accused of any crime.

Sometimes a chief orders that all his subjects shall undergo the ordeal.

As soon as it is known that a tribal ordeal is to be held, the *mondjo* magicians brew vast quantities of the drug with which is mixed many strange ingredients—including the fat of a leper long dead!

To make sure that the brew is of sufficient strength, it is first tried on the chief of all the magicians; named *Mudlayi*. If the decoction makes him intoxicated, he is sure the brewing is a success. If it fails, the ordeal is postponed until another and more powerful decoction is brewed.

The ordeal, as described in the story, is taken from the account of an eye witness and the effect of the poison on the people is in no way exaggerated.

According to an old native, the intoxication of the *bayloi* comes from the presence of human flesh in the solution. It is to be remembered that the *bayloi* are supposed to be eaters of flesh. The decoction, then, causes them to act in the day time as they are supposed to act at night after their gruesome meals.

Actually, the one who administers the drug is clever enough to give much larger doses to those who are suspected, or to those they desire to have put out of the way.

And, of course, there is a regular process of hypnotization in the witch doctor's performance. This, plus mob psychology, plus the superstitious fears of the people, explains why so many of those undergoing the ordeal fall into what seems to be a real cataleptic trance.

* * *

THE following will be of interest in connection with this fourth installment of Gordon's Young's "Days of '49," originally intended to be used as footnotes but given at Camp-Fire instead so that they might not impede the flow of the story.

Part II—Chapter I

Other authentic names are Loafer Hill, Hell's Delight, Poverty Hill, Hen-Roost Camp, One Eye, Petticoat Slide, Gospel Gulch. Hittell in *Resources of California* gives a list of a hundred such names.

Tin Cup was so named because the first miners there found the placers so rich that they measured their gold in pint tin cups. Marysville, still a prosperous town, was named after the only American woman in the vicinity. Pine Log was so-called because there happened to be a log across the river which the miners used in crossing.

"In the old California camps, as we have seen, the verbal conveyance of a claim was sufficient. Until 1860 the validity of such verbal sales was fully sustained by the State courts."—*Mining Camps*: A Study in American Frontier Government. By Charles Howard Shinn. New York. 1885. p. 274

"The Californians punished theft more than murder, because men carried their lives about with them, and might defend them, but property left to itself was defenceless. Moreover, where every man was obliged to defend himself, and in a measure to right his own wrongs, greater license was allowed in the employment of deadly weapons."—*Popular Tribunals*. Vo. i. p. 119.

This from another author: "It was a mad, furious race for wealth, in which men lost their identity almost, and toiled and wrestled, and lived a fierce, riotous, wearing, fearfully excited life; forgetting home and kindred; abandoning old steady habits; acquiring all the restlessness, craving for stimulant, unscrupulousness, hardihood, impulsive generosity, and lavish ways, which have puzzled the students of human nature who have undertaken to portray or to analyze that extraordinary period."—Parson's *Life of Marshall*.

In one of his accounts of the Donner Party tragedy, Bancroft begins with: "And now begins a tale whose sickening details blot pages of our annals; a tale before which I would gladly close my eyes and lay down my pen; a tale which call in question whether indeed there be in man, left to himself, any divine spark, any innate good."—*California Inter Pocula*. p. 93.

"There was not a grey hair in the country."—country."—CARLYLE ABBOTT in his *Recollections of a California Pioneer*. p. 86

The stormy rush with which these young miners swept into the country may be judged from the following: In February, 1848, there were 2,000 Americans in California; December, 1849, there were 53,000; by 1854 there were 300,000. Shinn's *Mining Camps*. p. 132.

Near Downieville, John Sykes sank a hole as deep as a man working alone would dare go, and got such a poor showing that he sold out to three miners for $100. Two feet deeper the new owners began to take out gold; and in sixty days took out $60,000.—*Autobiography of Charley Peters*. p. 207.

"Many of the miners decline washing the top dirt at all, but try to reach as quickly as possible the bed-rock, where are found the richest deposits of gold. The bed-rock, which in this vicinity is of slate, is said to run through the entire range, lying in distances varying from a few feet to eighty or ninety below the surface of the soil. Many holes, which had been excavated and prepared for working at great expense, caved in during the heavy rains of the fall and winter."—*The Shirley Letters from California Mines* in 1851-52. By MRS. LOUISE AMELIA KNAPP SMITH CLAPPE.

(These letters, written from the mines, appeared in the Pioneer Magazine of 1854-55 under the pen name of Dame Shirley; and were first reprinted by Thomas C. Russell, San Francisco, 1922. The Shirley Letters are a unique and valuable source for gathering color and intimacies of early camp life. Even Bret Harte borrowed from Dame Shirley.)

Until the miners began to catch on to the tricks that the rivers played with gold they would work both sides of a stream where there was a bar. Ryan in his *Personal Adventures* tells of working almost by the side of a man who was growing rich while others near him had no luck at all.

Dame Shirley tells of one pan of dirt at Rich Bar that contained $1,500. Three Mexicans, prospecting in Bear Valley, south of Sonora, took out $200,000 in a week. Fearing that the claim would be taken from them because they were "Greasers" they entered into partnership with four American miners who had treated them kindly; and from a hole twelve feet deep and twenty feet square the seven men in twenty days removed $400,000. A month later over three thousand miners were on the ground; but before another month had passed the diggings were abandoned—played out.—*Autobiography of Charley Peters*. p. 131.

"Men, in some cases, pulled up bunches of grass from the gulches and hillsides, shaking them into buckets, thus obtaining many pounds of gold; one miner gained $16,000 thus in five weeks. Another miner cleaned up $18,000 in one day's labor with pan and pick."—Shinn's *Mining Camps*. p. 119.

Two other newcomers at Marysville found a thirty pound nugget and immediately returned to the States for the purpose of exhibiting it at fifty cents a look; all told, they had been in California less than thirty days. Near Kelsey, El Dorado County, a newcomer sat watching a miner clean up his sluice boxes. The miner threw away a large stone; the newcomer picked it up: it was a shell of quartz containing a yelk of gold weighing two pounds.—Bancroft in *California Inter Pocula*. (These stories are from the compilation of events and incidents of the Gold Days included in Charley Peters' *Autobiography*.)

"The secret of Clarke's success in finding rich diggings was that he had no theory, but that he would go around prospecting in the most inconceivable places, untrammeled by the laws of science or even by the likelihood of auriferous distribution. His knowledge of cause and effect began and stopped at the proposition that if he drank too much whisky he would get drunk, and he was very assiduous in demonstrating the truth of his proposition."—*Gold and Sunshine*. Reminiscences of Early California. By COL. JAMES J. AYERS. Boston, 1922.

The miners believed that "drunken sailors" were blessed with luck. Clarke was a sailor, and one night while drunk fell into a gulch, and in trying to climb out tore up the ground. The next morning he saw that he had uncovered gold; and from this claim in two weeks took out $70,000. This camp became known as Steep Gulch and was mined for ten years. Ten years later a nugget weighing 28 lbs. was found sticking in a bank where it had been overlooked.—Charley Peters' *Autobiography*.

"It is difficult to understand why gold remained so long undiscovered in California, considering that so much of it was on the surface, even in those parts of the country already inhabited by whites. . . . Some of the best diggings have been discovered by market gardeners, who have chosen some apparently valueless tract for the purpose of cabbage growing. . . For four years Holden's acre of cabbage ground has been worked with great profit, pieces of gold of many pounds each have been taken from it."—Marryat's *Mountains and Molehills*. p. 279.

The following story is also told by Marryat: "One of the miners died, and having been much respected, it was determined to give him a regular funeral. A digger in the vicinity, who, report said, had once been a powerful preacher in the United States, was called upon to officiate; and after 'drinks all round,' the party proceeded with becoming gravity, to the grave, which had been dug at a distance of a hundred yards from the camp. When this spot was reached, the officiating minister commenced with an extempore prayer, during which all knelt round the grave. So far was well; but the prayer was unnecessarially long, and at last some of those who knelt, began, in an abstracted way, to finger the loose earth that had been thrown up from the grave. It was thick with gold; and an excitement was immediately apparent in the kneeling crowd. Upon this the preacher stopped, and inquiringly said, 'Boys, what's that? Gold!' he continued, 'and the richest kind of diggings—the congregation are dismissed!' The poor miner was taken from his auriferous grave and was buried elsewhere, while the funeral party, with the parson at their head, lost no time in prospecting the new digging."—p. 324. Charley Peters' *Autobiography* tells the same story but says the funeral was postponed until the claims had been staked.

"Nothing was sacred: all rights were subject to the claims of the miner. Many a case occurred, where the entire town was moved to an adjacent spot, and every inch of the soil on which it stood was sluiced away from grass-roots to bed-rock. In many other cases, the miners thought it better to tunnel underneath, as work out the layers of rich gravel as best they could; though this sometimes caused disasters, and buildings slid from their foundations."—Shinn's *Mining Camps*. p. 265.

The State courts of Early California decided that "all persons who settle for agricultural purposes upon any mining land in California, so settle at their own risk." Mining early farms were literally washed away by miners.

The townsites of Sonora, Columbia, Mokelumne Hill, Auburn, Placerville, Downieville and Oroville were found to be "pay dirt."

A man leading a mule drawing a cart through Sonora one morning after a rain stooped to remove a large stone, and found he had hold of a nugget, weighing 35 lbs.

In the fire at Placerville a man named Norton lost some jewelry when his house burned. He decided to sluice the ground to recover the gold from the ashes, and found that the ground upon which his house had stood was full of nuggets.

At Diamond Springs a chicken was killed for Sunday dinner. Its gizzard panned $12.50. The cooks in all the mining camps regularly examined chicken gizzards.

Five reporters stopped to camp beside a gulch, and naturally tested the gravel. It was a remote place and proved very rich. It was a week before another prospector came near them—but thirteen days from the time they had stopped to camp there were eight thousand miners in the new town; and the camp was named Columbia.

Frederic Hall in his *History of San José*, San Francisco, 1871, p. 194, says that American highwaymen had appeared on the trails by December, 1848; there were, according to Dr. Brooks, in *Four Months Among Gold-Finders*, Spanish bandits already famous on the trails before this; his party was robbed by one of them.

The statement is made in Bancroft's *Popular Tribunals*. Vol. i, p. 152.

"The typical lynching occurred, indeed, in a community of Americans, where everybody was by habit disposed to joke in public and seem as cheerful as he could, and to listen to all sorts of eloquence; but the affair itself was no expression of this formal joviality, nor yet of this submissiveness to oratorical leadership. It proceeded from a mood of utter revulsion against the accustomed good-humor of the camp. It was regarded as a matter of stern, merciless, business necessity. It was unconscious of any jocular character. Disorderly lynching affairs in some few cases, do, indeed, appear to have been mere drunken frolics. But nearly all, even of the most disorderly affairs, and that, too, where their cruelty was most manifest, had in them no element of the merely jocular. They expressed an often barbarous fury."—*California*. A Study of American Character. By Josiah Royce. Boston. 1886.

An American miner assaulted a Spaniard at Condemned Bar; and the Spaniard in self-defense wounded the miner. The mob spirit was aroused and the miners determined that the Spaniard should be hanged. Acting on the advice of the camp judge, who thought the act justifiable, the Spaniard attempted to escape by jumping into the river and was shot. A bystander pronounced the proceedings an outrage, and was at once killed by the mob, which even talked of hanging their judge. Bancroft's *Popular Tribunals*. Vol. i, p. 532.

"All gradations, we have said, can be found in the popular justice of the mines, from the most orderly and wisely conducted expression of outraged popular sentiment which is in anyway possible outside of the forms of law, down to the most brutal and disgraceful outbursts of mob fury. . I wish that the later class of incidents had been rarer than one actually finds them."—Royce's *California*.

Abbott also tells that he was about to be hanged without trial on suspicion of having stolen a belt of gold. One of his friends leveled a gun on the crowd and swore to shoot the man that put a rope on Abbott's neck. Abbott had accused one of the men in the crowd of the theft. The miners finally agreed to put Abbott and the man he had accused in a tunnel, by themselves, where they were to remain until one of them confessed. Abbott's friend managed to give him, unobserved by the miners, a gun. Inside the tunnel Abbott leveled this gun at the head of the man he thought guilty. The fellow confessed and produced the stolen gold.—Abbott's *Recollections of a California Pioneer*. p. 99.

"Those who were very fortunate often indulged in curious and expensive whims and 'extravaganzas,' feeling sure that their claims would continue to yield treasure. They bought the costliest broadcloth, drank the finest wines, and smoked the best brands of cigars. . . . Men who had been brought up to keep sober, and earn sixteen dollars a month and save half of it, went to California, found rich claims, earned several hundred dollars a month—of which they might have saved three-fourths—but spent every cent in riotous living. Men who had been New York hod-carriers paid out ten dollars a day for canned fruits and potted meats. But only a few years later, when the surface placers were all exhausted, these same unkempt sybarites returned to beans and pork, strapped up their blankets, and made prospect tours to other regions, taking their reverses more placidly than one could have thought possible."—Shinn's *Mining Camps*. p. 139.

"Sickness was an expensive pastime in those days, and to indulge in some diseases was much more costly than in others. The fee-bill of the San Francisco medical society, organized June 22nd, 1850, gives the prices for various visits and operations ranging from $16—one ounce—the lowest, to $1,000. a single visit was $32; for every hour detained, $32 additional; advice $50 to $100; night visits as consulting physicians $100; for various specified operations from $500 to $1,000. . . . .
At Yeates' rancho, in 1849, a man died. He had two yoke of cattle and a large quantity of provisions in his wagon. Dr. Sparks took care of him, and when he died claimed the cattle and wagon for the doctor's bill. Dr. Sparks was soon taken sick and Dr. Clinton took care of him. Sparks died and Clinton took cattle, wagon, provisions and all the property Sparks had, for his bill."—*California Inter Pocula*. p. 351.

Dances in Camp: "It was a strange sight to see a party of long-bearded men, in heavy boots and flannel shirts, going through all the steps and figures of the dance with so much spirit, and often with a great deal of grace, hearty enjoyment depicted on their dried-up sunburned faces, and revolvers and bowie knives glancing in their belts; while a crowd of the same rough-looking customers stood around, cheering them on to greater efforts, and occasionally dancing a step or two quietly on their own account. Dancing parties such as these were very common, especially in smaller camps where there was no such general resort as the gambling saloons of the larger towns. Whenever a fiddler could be found to play, a dance was got up. Waltzes and polkas were not so much in fashion as the lancers which appeared to be very generally known, and, besides, gave plenty of exercise to the light fantastic toes of the dancers; for here men danced, as they did everything else, with all their might; and to go through the lancers in such company was a very severe gymnastic exercise. The absence of ladies was a difficulty which was very easily overcome, by a simple arrangement whereby it was understood that every gentleman who had a patch on a certain part of his inexpressibles should be considered a lady for the time being. These patches were rather fashionable, and were usually large squares of canvas, showing brightly on a dark ground, so that the 'ladies' of the party were as conspicuous as if they had been surrounded by the usual quantity of white muslin."—Borthwick's *Gold Hunters*. Chapter XXI.

Use of Oaths: "I think that I have never spoken to you of the mournful extent to which profanity prevails in California. You know that at home it is considered *vulgar* for a gentleman to swear; but I am told that here it is absolutely the fashion, and that people who never uttered an oath in their lives while in the 'States,' now clothe themselves with curses as with a garment."—*The Shirley Letters*. p. 79.

Women in the Camps: "Society was masculine, and most of the men were under forty. In the spring of 1849 there were but fifteen women in San Francisco. . . . Bearded and weather-bronzed miners stood for hour in the streets to get a glimpse of a child at play. At a little later period, there were plenty of women who were 'vile libels on their sex;' but the reverence that Californians of the gold era paid to respectable women has received a tribute of admiring praise from all observers. Men often traveled miles to welcome 'the first real lady into camp.' "—Shinn's *Mining Camps*. p. 137.

A very fine camp hotel had been built at Rich Bar. Everything, lumber and all, was packed in at a freight charge of forty cents *per lb.* It was built by gamblers as a house of prostitution. Dame Shirley says: "To the lasting honor of miners be it written, the speculation proved a decided failure. . . . These unhappy members of a class, to one of which the tenderest words that Jesus ever spake were uttered, left in a few weeks, absolutely driven away by public opinion. The disappointed gamblers sold the house to its present proprietor for a few hundred dollars."—p. 39.

Hanging of a Woman: Joe Cannon, a respected miner, while drunk broke into the house of a Mexican girl, the mistress of a monte dealer. She killed him. This was in Downieville, July 5th, 1851. Five thousand men gathered in the town, angrily demanding punishment of the murderess. She was young, "scarcely five feet high, with a slender symmetrical figure, agile and extremely graceful in her movments. . . . Her name was Juanita. . . . And now when the enraged miners with a blow of the fist burst her door and stood before her, Juanita manifested not the slightest fear; and yet she knew she must die. . . . Probably in the history of mobs there was never a form of trial more farcical than this." She was put on a pavilion in the center of the town and "twelve men responded eagerly to the call for a jury. . . . A humane physician, Dr. Cyrus D. Aiken, mounted the stand and testified that she was not in a fit condition to be hanged. What such testimony had to do with the case nobody knew or cared. A howl of disapproval followed; the good doctor was driven from the stand, from the town, and dared not return or show himself for several days. A Mr. Thayer of Nevada attempted a speech on behalf of the prisoner . . . but he was beaten off the platform—ay, kicked from the tribunal; and on reaching the crowd without, where a passageway was opened for him, he was kicked along this gauntlet out of town. . . . So Juanita was tried. . . . She twisted up her long black tresses, smoothed her dress, placed the noose over her head and arranged the rope in a proper manner, and finally, lifting her hands, which she refused to have tied, exclaimed *Adios, Señores!* and the fatal signal was given."—*Popular Tribunals*. Vol. i, p. 577 seq.

"All accounts make her (Juanita) a woman of considerable beauty, of some intelligence and vivacity, and of a still quite youthful appearance; and she seems to have been a person not at all despised in the camp. . . . One who fancies that the fair prisoner was overwhelmed with abject terror all this while does not know her race. That same afternoon she was to suffer, and when the time came, she walked out very quietly and amiably, with hair neatly braided, stepped up to the improvised gallows, and made a short speech, in which she bade them all a cheerful farewell, and said that she had no defense for her crime, save that she had been made very angry by Cannon and would surely do the same thing again if she were to be spared, and were again to be as much insulted by anybody. Then she adjusted her own noose and cheerfully passed away."—Royce's *California*. p. 368 seq.

(This account was gathered by Prof. Royce from the account of an eye-witness appearing in a San Francisco newspaper.)

Pardners: "The early camps of California did more than merely to destroy all fictitious social standards. They began at once to create new bonds of human fellowship. The most interesting of these was the social and spiritual significance given to the partnership idea. It soon became almost as sacred as the marriage-bond. The exigencies of the work of mining-claims required two or three persons to labor together if they would utilize their strength to the best advantage. The legal contract of partnerships, common in settled communities, became, under these circumstances, the brother-like tie of '*pard*'-nership, sacred by camp custom protected by camp-law; and its few infringements were treated as crimes against every miner."—Shinn's *Mining Camps*. p. 111.

This description of the founding of Auburn is taken from *California Illustrated*, by a "returned" miner.

Chapter II

The information regarding the most advanced type of revolver and ammunition available in '49 has been furnished by the Secretary of the Colt Patent Fire Arms Mfg. Co., Hartford, Conn.

Greasers: Oddly enough, this name was first applied in the early California trading days by the Spaniards to the Americans and English because they bought hides and tallow; and the latter returned the compliment because the Californians sold it.—*California Pastorial*. By HUBERT HOWE BANCROFT. San Francisco. 1888. p. 290.

"This tendency to despise, abuse, and override the Spanish-American, may well be called one of the darkest threads in the fabric of Anglo-Saxon frontier government."—Shinn's *Mining Camps*. p. 218.

"The zeal of General Smith in proposing to exclude foreigners from the mines gave countenance to a class which stood prepared to achieve it by forcible measures. A number of isolated affairs took place, chiefly in ejecting Spanish-Americans from desirable claims, which the usurpers proceeded to work with a tacit approval of their countrymen."—Bancroft's *History of California*. Vol. vi, p. 403.

This appears in the *Shirley Letters* as an example of miner's Spanish.

Chapter III

When the Mexican girl, Juanita, was brought forth at Downieville, voices were heard to cry, "Give her a fair trial and hang her!"

The Spaniard's Calmness: Besides the illustration of indifference to death given by Juanita, there are many instances confirming the Spaniard's same calm attitude in the face of the rope. A Spaniard who understood no English was abusively sentenced to be hanged by a judge at San Jose in 1850, who demanded of the prisoner in broken Spanish if he understood. " . . . evidently he did understand, for with the characteristic nonchalance of his race, he replied, illustrating by signs and gurglings the hanging and choking process: 'Yes, sir, I am to be hanged at a rope's end; strangled, so; it is nothing; thank you.' "—*California Inter Pocula*. p. 656.

The Shirley Letters tell of a young Spaniard who begged for the rope to escape the whip.

Lawyers in Camp: 'We needed no law,' writes an old pioneer, 'until the lawyers came;' and this idea is repeated in a thousand forms. 'There were few crimes,' says one correspondent, 'until the courts with their delays and technicalities took the place of miners' law.' This is, in truth, the persistent prejudice against lawyers that has existed among frontiersmen in every age of the world."—Shinn's *Mining Camps*. p. 120.

It may be interesting to note that among the Spanish Basques neither lawyers nor priests are permitted to represent the people legislatively, because, says the Basques, members of these professions are always on the side of tyranny.

Chapter IV

Many observers of '49 customs were amused by the fact that it was not considered good manners for a man to go to bed wearing his hat, though it was perfectly proper to retire in his boots.

* * *

AS TO the anti-weapon campaign. If any of you think it is a dead issue or a mare's nest, wake up! The trouble with so many of us Americans is that we size up an issue of this kind, see that it is foolish, hear other people say it is foolish and, by some strange lack of reasoning, more or less unconsciously decide it is too foolish ever to become a law. And do nothing about it. Wake up! There are plenty of people who are *for* it—and who meanwhile are working for it tooth and toe-nail.

Unless a very strong and active interest takes the field against the anti-weapon bill it is going to become a law and Americans will lose another slice of personal liberty. The country woke up one morning and, to its intense surprize, found that Prohibition had become a law. We're going to have another surprize unless we get busy *beforehand* against this anti-weapon legislation. Consider. There are lots of sheep in this country—sheep who mean well but don't or can't think, and sheep who as voters are for sale or the slaves of their political herders. It is not a pleasant thing to admit, but at present there are enough sheep to decide any election.

Between propagandists and political herders most of them are being neatly led into the anti-weapon fold. Only very vigorous work on our part can turn enough of them the other way to save the day.

Consider again. Who has put the propagandists and herders on the job? *Nobody knows!* An immense amount of money is being spent. Who furnishes it? Nobody knows. All kinds of forces and influences are being set to work. Who sets them to work? Nobody knows. Plenty of fanatics and professional reformers in this country, but not enough to do what's being done, nor can what's being done be done without some powerful and highly organized body or group to furnish sinews of war and plan of campaign. Who or what is it? Nobody knows.

Consider once more. Even allowing for fools and sheep, this anti-weapon legislation is so idiotic that even a moderately powerful force could not put it across. In essence it has been tried out in practise and proved a failure: New York City, notoriously soft picking for the thugs, has for years been "protected" by such a law. The McAdoo bill, so heavily discriminative against all but the rich, is so rotten a piece of class legislation that it stinks. Prohibition has demonstrated in practise that, whether Prohibition enforcement as a whole be deemed a success or a failure, millions of prohibited items can be brought into our country and sold to any buyer. A revolver is infinitely easier to smuggle than a bottle and lasts years longer. Even a few hundred thousand smuggled revolvers will make a joke of any law against their use, for even a fool and a sheep will admit that the crooks will get revolvers if anybody does. They need them in their business.

No need to go on. You all know the practical absurdity of such a bill as well as the involved dangers to our personal and national liberty and safety. And yet, despite the patent absurdity, it is being put across on the mass of the people. Only an extremely powerful force could accomplish that.

What is it? And why is it at such great pains to work secretly, under cover, never once showing its head? What force, political, class, financial or religious, is working underground and accomplishing so much?

And just what is its object in being so anxious to take arms away from the mass of law-abiding Americans? Safety of the individual? Safety ——! It's last and least thought is for the safety of the average American citizen. It wants something for itself. What is it? All we know is that it's something it's afraid to name, something Americans would never willingly give up if open attempt were made to get it.

The Reds? The rich few who control most of this country's affairs? One or the other would seem the most likely guess. If the Reds are not the force, be sure they are adding their own efforts to help it along in their own interests. If it's the rich few, the Reds would work for it just the same. It would both accomplish their avowed policy of disarming the body of the people and would help the rich few tighten their grip on the people still closer to the point at which the people will refuse to endure being bled any longer and will stage another American Revolution—let us hope, a peaceful one. Of the two forces the Reds are more to be feared, because they are more intelligent than the monopolist rich whose greed is so blind it paves the way for the Red debâcle and because their regime would be ushered in with sudden destruction instead of being gradually adjusted to the limit the people will bear—or to what they think the people will bear.

Whatever this force is, it is secret and hostile. We can not fight it direct because we do not know what it is. All we know is that for some reason of its own it wants this anti-weapon law. All we can do is to fight that anti-weapon law by every legitimate means within our grasp. That is the immediate battle. And for the most part we've done little but talk among ourselves.

Get after your legislators and get after them hard and at once! Get systematic counter propaganda under way.

Here is one way of doing the latter. Our Camp-Fire is not a place to pass the hat, but any place where good Americans are gathered is the place to listen to a plea for funds to fight an American battle. As you know, *Field and Stream* has been conducting an organized campaign against the anti-weaponers, and *Adventure* has acted on the belief it can best help the cause by backing up another magazine that was already at work instead of dividing forces and starting a movement of its own. It's proud to play second fiddle in this matter and it's sufficiently unabashed to suggest that, if there were a whole lot more willingness in this country to play second fiddle at the right time, our various movements for betterment would have accomplished some 500% more than they have accomplished.

Read *Field and Stream's* letter and do what you think best. Any contributions should be sent to *Field and Stream*, not to *Adventure*.

New York City.

The anti-pistol forces are again active and are beginning what appears to be a nation-wide, aggressive campaign of all kinds of propaganda for the purpose of putting the McAdoo Bill through the next session of Congress. As of course you know, the McAdoo Bill is the one which places an excise tax of one hundred dollars on every pistol and revolver, and one dollar on every loaded cartridge, and fifty cents on every empty cartridge-shell, sold by any manufacturer or dealer after the bill's enactment into law.

Among the methods which the anti-pistol people will use to spread their propaganda is the radio.

One of the most powerful broadcasting stations in the United States, located in Cincinnati, a station which is heard by hundreds of thousands of people, will rent us the use of its microphone whenever we wish it to tell our side of the story.

It seems to me that we should take advantage of this opportunity; and *Field & Stream Magazine* is making an appeal to its readers for contributions to defray the expense.

As this expense is very heavy, and as it is in behalf of *Adventure* readers quite as much as of *Field & Stream* readers, I am wondering whether the former will not join in contributions to be sent to us for this purpose.

We would like to give a series of talks all fall, in order to explain the situation as we see it to as many people as possible, and in order to give direct answers to broadcasting which will be done by the antis from time to time. This is going to run into big money before we are through. We need all the help we can get.

Needless to state that every dollar we receive will be strictly accounted for and used for no other purpose than to fight this anti-pistol propaganda. Also needless to say, no contribution can be either too small or too large to be acceptable. As a matter of fact, it would be a great deal better to have ten thousand readers of *Adventure* sufficiently interested to put up twenty-five cents apiece than it would to have twenty-five hundred readers put up one dollar apiece—P. C. CODY, *Field & Stream*, 45 West 45th Street, New York City.

* * *

SOMETHING from William Byron Mowery in connection with his complete novelette in this issue—as to rough trading methods, Aleuts and kelp:

At different times several different islands of the Aleutian chain have been called Attoonai. In this story I had none of them in mind. My Attoonai is a sort of cross, I guess, between Kadiak and Unalaska.

THE trading methods of *Berg* and *Zakhar* may seem a little incredible. I can't help that; the actual historical records would themselves seem incredible were they not substantiated by indisputable evidence; by eye-witnesses who wrote diaries, by ship logs, and by such reputable men as Mueller and Klebnikof. I was positively conservative about the cruelties practised upon the Aleutians. Compared with Yakof Chuprof and other historial characters like him, *Berg* and *Zakhar* are mild. There are recorded instances, not isolated but repeated, where natives were buried up to their necks and starved. Instances where groups of women were taken on board for the term of a voyage and then cast into the sea when the ship neared Kamchatka on its return. Instances where the theft of an iron bolt or some other equally trivial thing caused the slaughter of half a tribe.

I would be sorry to give the impression, however, that all or even a majority of the traders were so heartless. In those times and in that far region there were bound to be *Glottofs;* but there were also such men as Shelikof and Prybylof. Be it said to Catherine's honor that she went to great expense and trouble to see that the Aleuts were kindly treated. Two of her emissaries were aboard every duly-charted vessel, to carry out her orders.

ONE other matter—the uses to which *Korelin* puts the "sea-cabbage." These uses may seem a little strange to one acquainted only with Atlantic kelp. But the natives did practically everything with the peculiar kelp of the north Pacific. They wove rugs, made blue dye, made all sizes of cordage from pack-thread to inch rope, made baby garments, made a dozen kinds of medicine, made a sort of pancake, and *made coils for their houtchini stills* —MOWERY.

AND a word in connection with his story in the August 30th issue.—Skraelings, Eskimos, Crees, Nascaupees, Vikings, sagas, eddas:

Austin, Texas.

You will note that I use the word *skraeling* to mean Indian as well as Eskimo. The rather common impression is that *skraeling* means Eskimo alone. This is wrong. The term, at least until 1400, was used almost as we use "savages" today. As proof, in the *Eyrbyggja* saga, occurs this: "—but Snorri went with Karlsefni to Vinland the Good. They fought with the *skraelings* there in Vinland. There fell Thorbrand, Snorri's son, one of the bravest of men—". I could cite other instances, but suffit.

Several (four, to be exact) phrases and expressions which are used over and over again in the sagas and eddas, and which are therefore common property and which express the idea as no other phrase possibly could, I have ventured to use without quotation marks. *Eg.* "go harrying over the whale-path;" "Could jump his own length backward with all his war gear on"—remember Gunnar in the Burnt Njal?

I do not know, and I don't think anybody else does (this latter statement does not follow from the former) what was the name of the Indians living in the Labrador interior up to Lat. 55 or 56 at the time of this story. They probably were swampy Crees, like the present-day Nascaupees, driven up into this less hospitable region by the early Iroquois. Possibly the modern Nascaupees are descendents of them; possibly not. The word Nenenot (true men) is the term by which the Nascaupees call themselves today.—W. BYRON MOWERY.

* * *

WE'RE making a change in our magazine's policy that we're pretty sure you will approve. In fact, if we hadn't been practically sure of your approval we'd have put the question up to all you readers before deciding as to any change.

Only poetry is involved. Probably we in the office are a fair sample of the rest of you as to our attitude toward poetry. Most of us like real poetry, poetry that really has something to say and says it so that "it gets to a fellow where he lives," but the usual run of magazine verse leaves us cold and is forgotten as soon as read. We're not apologizing for *Adventure's* poetry in the past, but hereafter we're going at things in an entirely different way.

We're going to reject about 99% of the poems submitted to us. Sometimes 100%. The result will be that there will be issues, at least for a while, without any poetry at all. The present issue, for example. The reason we'll accept so few is that there are so few that are the kind we want. For the kind of poem we're trying to get is the kind that really gets to a man's heart, that sticks in his mind because it gives him something he wants to keep, that he may even care enough about to memorize from start to finish.

There aren't many. Not very often shall we be able to give you one that does all that. Not many, perhaps, that approximate it very closely. But we're going to do the best we can. Only two of the seven of us are fully competent to pass on the fine points of poetry technique; the rest of us are just common or garden fellows who know when their emotions are stirred and when they're not. And we're going to judge poems by whether or not they stir the emotions. Technique will be valued only as it contributes to that end, not for any merit in itself.

Here's a letter we've sent out to a few poets as a starter—practically all of them men:

> *Adventure* is going to break away from the usual magazine policy on verse and take what we think you will endorse as a step forward. We shall—
>
> (1) Cut loose from the general magazine habit of using poems merely as "fillers."
>
> (2) Try to print poetry, not magazine verse; hold to a rigid standard of selection; print only one or two poems an issue—probably only six a month at most (three issues a month); print none at all if we have none up to our standards.
>
> (3) Judge poetry by standards somewhat different from the usual ones.
>
> (4) Try gradually to make *Adventure* earn the reputation of publishing nothing but the best poetry.
>
> We base our standard of selection upon the principle that the primary appeal of poetry must be to the emotions, not to the intellect; that the essential test of a poem's art is the extent to which it stirs the emotions; that the artistry of technique is of value only in so far as it renders the emotional appeal more effective; that in too much of our present-day verse it is made an end in itself.
>
> A certain few poems live on in the hearts of men. Some of these are crude, some perfect in expression. Some of the folk who make them part of their lives are crude, some keyed to the finest shadings. Each one of these poems lives because it has reached hearts, some despite lack of technique, some by its aid. But even the crudest of these few do live while countless perfect expressions fall cold and die. We think no man can draw the line at which imperfect technique outweighs an inherent emotional appeal, but we are sure that emotional appeal is infinitely the greater value of the two, and in judging poetry we shall make it our first and chief test.
>
> Poems must fall within *Adventure's* general field, but that field is a very wide one. We have no particular leaning toward gore; on the other hand, a very strong aversion for the trivialities of an ingrowing civilization.
>
> Humorous poems, at least for the present, are not desired. The tender passion is not for our pages. Nor the morbid or unclean, nor a too painstaking examination of one's psychological insides. Realism if you like, but not the realism of life's sewers.
>
> We are particularly open to ballads of our own country and of Canada.
>
> If you labor under the idea that *Adventure's* audience is a low-brow one, please let the facts dispel that illusion. Professional men—educators, physicians, lawyers, clergymen—form by far the largest group among them.
>
> At the end of each year we shall give the *Adventure* Prize for Poetry, one hundred dollars, for the best poem published by us during the year. As we are already scheduled through most of 1925, the first award will cover 1926 and such of 1925 as are covered by the new policy. The votes of the readers will be a factor in selection.

There will probably be no formal vote by readers, but, as you know, we keep careful record of all comments or criticisms you make on anything in the magazine. Help us in our hunt for real poetry by telling us when a poem really registers on you and when it fails to do so.

* * *

THERE is something about the queer animal one of us dug up last year and asked Camp-Fire to identify:

> Pacific Grove, California.
>
> Z. G. Deutsch's letter relating to the so-called Lamp Eel, is the provocation of this letter. I am quite certain that the animal referred to was the so-called conger eel, not a true eel at all, but rather a member of the order Amphibia, which contains also the frogs, toads, mud puppies, hellbender, etc. The ridiculously short legs and triangular head and snake-like body are all entirely characteristic of these amphibians which are to be found in some quantity in the swamp lands of the South. The word "Lamp eel" is probably a contraction for Lamprey eel, a marine and fresh water animal belonging to the order Cyclostomata. The cyclostomes are generally conceded to be lower than fish in the evolutionary scale. They belong to the lowest order of the vertebrates. They are without limbs other than very primitive fins; have permanently open mouths with rasping teeth, by which they attach and even bore into large fish.
>
> Possibly this information will do something toward correcting erroneous impressions that are very current.—E. F. RICKETTS, President Pacific Biological Laboratories.

SERVICES TO OUR READERS

Lost Trails, for finding missing relatives and friends, runs in alternate issues from "Old Songs That Men Have Sung."

Old Songs That Men Have Sung, a section of "Ask Adventure," runs in alternate issues from "Lost Trails."

Camp-Fire Stations: explanation in the second and third issues of each month. Full list in second issue of each month.

Various Practical Services to Any Reader: Free Identification Card in eleven languages (metal, 25 cents); Mail Address and Forwarding Service; Back Issues Exchanged; Camp-Fire Buttons, etc., runs in the last issue of each month.

Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts.

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the section in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert may give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelop and *full* postage, *not attached,* are enclosed. (See footnote at bottom of page.) Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union. Be sure that the issuing office stamps the coupon in the left-hand circle.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose section it seems to belong.**

> ***Please Note:*** **To avoid using so much needed space each issue for standing matter and to gain more space for the actual meat of "Ask Adventure" the full statement of its various sections and of "Lost Trails" will be given only in alternate issues. In other issues only the bare names of the sections will be given, inquirers to get exact fields covered and names and addresses from full statement in alternate issues. Do *not* write to the magazine, but to the editors of the sections at their home addresses.**

1—3. The Sea. In Three Parts
4—6. Islands and Coasts. In Three Parts
7, 8. New Zealand and the South Sea Islands. In Two Parts
9. Australia and Tasmania
10. Malaysia, Sumatra and Java
11. New Guinea
12, 13. Philippine and Hawaiian Islands
13—18. Asia. In Five Parts
19—26. Africa. In Eight Parts
27, 28. Turkey and Asia Minor
29—35. Europe. In Six Parts
36—38. South America. In Three Parts
39. Central America
40—42. Mexico. In Three Parts
43—51. Canada. In Nine Parts
52. Alaska
53. Baffinland and Greenland
54—59. Western U. S. In Six Parts
60—64. Middle Western U. S. In Five Parts
65—74. Eastern U. S. In Ten Parts
A. Radio
B. Mining and Prospecting
C. Old Songs That Men Have Sung
D1—3. Weapons, Past and Present. In Three Parts
E. Salt and Fresh Water Fishing
F, G. Forestry in the U. S. and Tropical Forestry
H—J. Aviation, Army and Navy Matters
K. American Anthropology North of Panama Canal
L. First Aid on the Trail
M. Health-Building Outdoors
N. Railroading in the U. S., Mexico and Canada
O. P. Herpetology and Entomology
Standing Information

More Aviation Terms

SOME definitions that should make clear to the laymen a few of the more technical expressions employed by aeronauts:

Request:—"Please explain the meaning of the following aeronautical terms:

1.—Stagger.
2.—Angle of Incidence.
3.—Decalage.
4.—Dihedral.
5.—Propeller Diameter.
6.—Propeller Pitch.
7.—Negative Rake.
8.—Sweepback.
9.—Gliding Angle.

Thanking you in advance for the above information, I am, yours very sincerely."—ROBERT LENTZ, Fort Worth, Texas.

Reply, by Lt. Schauffler:—Here are the definitions of the aeronautical terms you wished to know—

1. Stagger. The stagger of planes is when the planes of a biplane are set with the upper one slightly ahead of, or abaft, they are said to be stagger. The stagger is measured by the angle made by the line joining the leading edges with the normal to the chord of the airplane. It is convenient to call the stagger positive if the upper plane is ahead of the lower.

2. Angle of Incidence. The angle the plane makes with the direction of its motion relative to the air. The angle is usually measured by the chord of the plane and the direction of motion. This is sometimes called the angle of attack.

3. Decalage. The difference in the angle of incidence between any two distinct aerofoils on an aeroplane; *e.g.*, the main plane and the tail; or more usually between the chords of the upper and lower planes of a biplane.

4. Dihedral. In geometry, the angle between two planes. The planes of an airplane are said to be at a dihedral angle when both right and left planes are upwardly or downwardly inclined to a horizontal transverse line. The angle is measured by the inclination of each plane to the horizontal. If the inclination is upward the angle is said to be positive; if downward, negative.

5. Propeller's Diameter. The distance from tip to tip is the propeller's diameter.

6. Propeller Pitch. The distance that would be traveled by a propeller in one revolution if there was no slip. The distance from the center of one thread on an airscrew to the center of the next adjacent thread.

7. Sweepback. The horizontal angle between the lateral axis of an airplane and the leading edge of the main plane.

8. Gliding Angle. The angle between the horizontal and the path along which an airplane in ordinary flying altitude but not under engine power descents in still air.

"Ask Adventure" service costs you nothing whatever but reply postage and self-addressed envelop.

The Endicott Range

EVERY once in a while an inquirer hits on a question that is especially close to an expert's heart, and then he gets an answer worth we won't say how many times the postage it cost him. That is, if he remembers to enclose postage. This inquirer did.

Request:—"I am thinking of making a trip to the Endicott Mountains in Alaska and would like to ask a few questions before starting out.

First: What time of the year does the snow leave the valleys and creek bottoms in the Endicotts?

Second: Has much prospecting been done in that country?

Third: What is the general climate in those mountains?

Fourth: Are there any sawmills, logging camps, mines or other work along the Yukon where a fellow could make a grub stake in case he went broke?

Fifth: What kind of craft would you advise two men to take, traveling on the Yukon from Whitehorse to Fort Yukon?

Sixth: About what do they charge for flour and beans in the small towns along the river?

Seventh: What kind of game and fur bearing animals would I find in the Endicotts?

Will greatly appreciate any advice or information you will send."—W. E. DOWNEY, Elk, Washington.

Reply, by Mr. Solomon:—You started something when you asked about the Endicott Range in Alaska. First man ever to make an inquiry of me regarding that region. To tell you the truth I'd like to take a little vacation up there myself. Never been closer than a hundred or so miles from it, west end and again in Central Alaska north of the Yukon. But of course I've heard a lot about the region and have what dope the Geological Survey possesses.

It's about as unknown a region as there is in Alaska, and as little known as anywhere on the continent, probably except north Canada bordering the Arctic Ocean and the Arctic lands farther north still. It's the range or divide between the Yukon and the Arctic tundra belt fronting the frozen ocean, and it extends from the west (or northwest) coast of Alaska, clear to the eastern or northeastern margin of Alaska, though the west end is called the Baird Mountains. The Koyukuk, Chandelar and Porcupine, the three big northern tributaries of the Yukon, flow southward from the Endicotts, together with a few smaller rivers between. As you go east the range becomes higher, somewhat. It is nowhere as lofty as the Southern Alaska mountains, the Mount McKinley range and the others of the circle that ends in southwestern Alaska at the seaboard, but, being farther north, the Endicotts are pretty near as snowy and glaciated, and wild and scenic in the extreme. Men have pierced them here and there from the Yukon branches, but little is known of them except on one or two forcing of the passes by geological survey parties who, in the vicinity of their routes made fair reconnaissance maps. This is true especially of the headwaters of one or two branches of the Koyukuk (which has been sparsely settled for many years, but not right up in the mountains) and in the vicinity of the Chandelar. The region of the north and northwestern branches of the Porcupine, particularly, are quite unknown, including of course the headwaters in the Endicott Range.

It would be a paradise for hunters and trappers, I imagine; rather high up for moose, but ideal for caribou and mountain sheep and an occasional musk ox—rarer and rarer of late years. And of course all the northern fur-bearers would be found, especially very fine mink and fox and doubtless marten. Also muskrats and northern squirrel, timber wolves, some few wolverine and land otter in fair quantities. I judge proportions by the proportion of furs offered me when I traded with natives in the region near the Endicotts (southwest).

ON THE north side the snow never leaves most of the gulleys and sheltered slopes, nor in the deeper basins and canyons on the south side, and there are glaciers galore (none very large, for the precipitation is low). But the general surface is free about the end of May and doesn't coat next until the end of September nor permanently till about the end of October. Little or no prospecting has been done there except in the few places referred to and this only hastily. The climate is colder than Billy-Be——. Except, however, for an occasional storm the general interior Yukon climate will prevail, which is fairly still, and better, on the whole than the Arctic or Behring Sea coast where blizzards are rather plenteous. Remember when you get ALTITUDE as well as latitude you have colder temperatures and a bit longer winters. However, climate never hurts with careful men, and the fur is that much finer. In the Yukon valley at the mining and trading settlements there is always a fair amount of work to be obtained, and you could doubtless connect with it in case you were driven south by necessity.

As to craft for the descent of the Yukon, a light batteau, raised ends (need not be pointed) will be excellent if you are taking in an outfit. A smaller outfit will go in a big skiff or dory. Purely personal stuff will go in a canoe if you want to buy your outfit on the Yukon for the ascent of the rivers toward the mountains. But FOR the ascent WITH an outfit of course you'd use a big, long poling boat, the only practicable thing; and in that case you might desire to use it in the voyage down the river. But why bother with a boat when you can ship yourselves and your outfit from Seattle to any point on the Yukon, PLUS a boat for going up the rivers if you don't want to trust to picking up what will probably be a more serviceable one at the Yukon point where you start? After you get below the Rink and Five-finger Rapids on the Yukon (or really the Thirty-mile, which is actually the last bit of hard water on the river) any kind of a boat, catamaran, raft or exalted wash-tub will do, but in the swift and sometimes white and rock-filled waters of the upper Yukon the craft more readily handled is the best, though many (including yours truly) negotiated it in a rather clumsy scow.

FLOUR and beans on the Yukon are worth outside price, plus freight, plus about twenty to thirty percent-profit. You can figure it for yourself when you get the transportation companies' schedule of freight rates. In short, food is reasonable, transport remembered. Two-fifty or three dollars for flour would about hit it on that commodity, I fancy, assuming about a couple of cents a pound for freight. The heavy commodities usually come up river all through Alaska, some down river to lower Yukon Territory points, such as Dawson and Forty-mile. That covers all your questions. To which I might add that for a winter or two's roughing it in the Endicotts you have your work cut out for you, as the saying is, it being mighty hard to get a good outfit way up there, for navigation will cease for you with the higher tributaries, leaving you many miles short of the actual mountains, and you won't have a pack horse or two to do the rest of it unless you go in in the summer, and then you'd have to have some one else bring up the stuff in a boat. If you tackle the Koyukuk end of the range you could not get supplies at Bettles or Allakakat up the That River, and then you'd have a hundred or so miles to the real mountains. You will guess from these random remarks that inland transportation is—as usual in new countries—the one big problem, especially where the country is immense, as it is in Alaska. Be sure you have plenty of dried vegetables, dried fruit and SUGAR in addition to the usual flour, beans, bacon, etc. You will get plenty of meat and fish and berries up there. Better get the publications of the U. S. Geological Survey, Wash., D. C., on request.

Names and addresses of department editors and the exact field covered by each section are given in the next issue of the magazine. Do NOT write to the magazine itself.

Morocco

IT IS much like Southern California —in climate.

Request:—"I would like to know about Morocco, W. Africa.

1. What is the climate like?
2. What is the general language spoken?
3. What are the living conditions and costs?
4. Can I buy cheap land say for sheep ranching or farming and about what price per acre?
5. Is their money the same as ours or do they use Spanish money?
6. Are there any industries in Morocco or commercial trade?
7. I am a blacksmith and a shoemaker. Would there be any chance for employment?

I have a family—1 boy auto mechanic. We have about $3,500, and would you advise to go there and start business?

Any other information would be appreciated. I realize I am asking a great deal and am leaving it to your judgment.

If published please do not use name.

Enclosed find addressed envelope and stamp."
———, British Columbia, Canada.

Reply, by Mr. Holt:—I judge that the only reason that you desire this information is to determine whether or not you should attempt to go into business in Morocco, and I am therefore not going into any detail in this letter except emphatically to say no. We folks on this continent can not compete with the very cheap labor and lower standards of living of the French and Spanish, to say nothing of the Moroccan natives.

The climate is almost exactly the same as southern California, and also like Baja (Mexican) California, which the land still more resembles because of the lack of water. The general language—or languages, rather, for a man would need them all to function intelligently—would be Arabic, Spanish and French. Land is, of course, cheap, but very nearly worthless in a large part of the country. You could buy land just as cheaply in places in southern California or in Mexican California where there is no water—and you would find other conditions just about the same. There are certain industries and considerable trade in Morocco, all of which are in the hands of the French.

I think this answers the desires expressed in your letter. If you want to leave British Columbia and have three or four thousand dollars which you want to invest so it will give you a good living *and be safe*, I would advise you to look into southern California, which, through its numerous irrigation projects, is now undergoing splendid development, and where there would seem to me to be the most excellent opportunities for you and your son. If you care to write me direct I will be very glad to send you further information about this part of the country (although, of course, I have not the slightest personal interest in real estate or similar matters), and I take pleasure in enclosing herewith a copy of the newspaper which has just been started here.

Sharks and Pearls

A BRACE of schemes that apparently are not nearly so fantastic as the inquirer feared.

Request:—"No doubt this is mostly a hare-brained scheme but I have had my mind on something of this kind for years and if there is a fair chance of making it pay I think I would like to try it. —— & Co. of San Francisco tell me that they can use pearl shells and shark fins in any quantity, and I figure that there ought to be a chance of picking up considerable of both along the west coast of Central America. If you think this scheme has any chance of being a paying proposition I should like to submit a few questions:

1. If it is not consistent to work the two together, which is the better proposition?
2. Where would be the best location for each or both?
3. Would permits for either or both be needed and where would I obtain them?
4. Would the cost be too high to go into it in a small way?
5. What kind of equipment would I need for each proposition?
6. Would I be able to hire natives that understand how to fish for sharks or pearls?
7. Are there any other products that could be picked up around there and be made to pay?
8. I would probably land there with $500 or $600. Would that be enough to do anything with in a small way?
9. What if any thing would I need to take with me from the states?

Any other information or suggestion that you can give me will be gratefully received. I might add that I am 45 years of age, in good health and single. Have knocked around at various things all my life, including several years at sea. Have been in Central America a little, viz: Costa Rico and Panama mostly for the U. F. Co.

Vocabulary in Spanish very limited. Thanking you for any information you care to give me, I am most sincerely yours"—C. S. MOSHER, Monmouth, Oregon.

Reply, by Mr. Edgar Young:—Speaking of sharks reminds me of sitting on a box car and fishing for them with my friend the *alcalde* of Puerto Barries in Guatemala. We had a couple of ropes with a chain down near the hook and we hauled out any number of them. The bay was literally infested with them. I have also seen any number of them on the west coast, but so far as sharks are concerned I believe there are more on the Atlantic side. I had several experiences with them when walking down the east coast of Costa Rica from Limon to Old Harbour. The mouth of every river was teeming with them and I sometimes had to sit on the river bank for hours before venturing in to swim across. I have seen them swimming within three feet of where I crouched on the river bank.

It seems to me that a combination business as follows would be better:

After catching the shark cut the fins off and then boil the critter up and extract the oil and then make fertilizer out of what was left after pressing out the oil from the meat. The teeth are also valuable. They make a nice watch fob, stick pin, etc. when capped with gold and mounted. I don't know who buys them, but I have seen any number of them for sale in Colon and other places. You might be able to get the caps made with rings and mount them yourself. The tooth is small, about like a grain of popcorn, but when mounted they look curious enough for a tourist to buy, and I suppose they buy the most of them.

Also by taking out the back-bone and running a steel rod through it and dressing down a fine walking cane can be made. The jaws with teeth intact, spread wide open to show the full width of the jaw, when dried and polished is worth several dollars to the tourist. I know also that shark-skin dried is also used in certain classes of fine furniture work instead of sand-paper. Just who buys it, I don't know, but I do know there is a market for it.

I have heard that the oil from the cavity in the jaw that lubricates the jaw joints is about as good for watchmakers as porpoise jaw oil. Porpoise jaw oil is a very fine and costly oil and there is a ready market for it. A little research about whether shark jaw oil would answer the same purpose would be worth investigating.

My main idea is that it would pay you to find out just how many things could be done with a shark so that you would not have to throw the body away after cutting off the fins. I know also that the meat of certain sorts of sharks is good food. The idea is to make Mr. Shark go the full limit.

SO FAR as pearly shells are concerned, my observations are that the greater quantity of these are to be found on the Pacific side. I never had occasion but once to investigate the matter and this was on the west coast of Nicaragua. There are any number of beds of pearl-bearing oysters and conches to be found all the way from Mexico south to and beyond Panama. There is quite a pearl industry off the coast of Panama at the Pearl Islands and this could possibly be duplicated on the west coast of Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Honduras, or Salvador.

My idea along this line would be to take native Indian women as divers, outfit a native sailing boat and look for pearls and make the shells pay the expenses of the business. I think shells can be bought in quantity in several of the small sailing boat ports along the west coast of C. A. There may be just as many shells on the east side, but I never had occasion to find out.

1. The shark fishing industry looks like a winner if handled right.
2. Puerto Barrios, Guatemala.
3. Such permits as would be needed, if any, would be easy to obtain.
4. No.
5. You could possibly get all the equipment locally.
6. Yes.
7. Yes. Ivory nuts, coconuts, balsa wood, many barks and native products have a ready market here in this country. Write Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce, Washington, D. C. for list of products imported into this country from C. A.
8. Yes.
9. Plenty of nerve.

Eucalyptus

A HARD wood if there ever was one.

Request:—"The writer is very much interested in the commercial possibilities of a eucalyptus grove located in the Santa Maria Valley.

The grove referred to has transportation facilities nearby and is about five acres in extent, the trees growing very close together; most of the trees are very straight and tall and could be used for telephone poles if this wood is adaptable to such use.

My question is: Do you think it would be profitable to cut this grove and is there a market in this state for logs of this wood? Also would it be possible to sell this wood for fuel purposes and if so would it have to be cured before marketing."—J. L. L., Santa Monica, Cal.

Reply, by Mr. Harriman:—Eucalyptus logs have never had a market here, excepting as fuel. For fuel they have to be cut, split and piled to season or else they do not burn well. Dry eucalyptus is fine in an open grate. The great difficulty is, that most people in the towns now cook with gas and heat with gas. The well-to-do who have open grates buy eucalyptus wood, but the market is not very active.

The logs have never yet been used as telephone poles. I think a large reason for this is the fact that a dry eucalyptus is very hard and the linemen would experience difficulty in using climbing spurs.

A few pilings of this kind, used by a bridge and pier builder when he thought he could cheat a little, proved to be far more enduring than the ordinary pilings. I have wondered many times why eucalyptus pilings were not used extensively, but it is hard to teach most folks.

I advise you to investigate the market for eucalyptus wood as fuel before you buy a grove. Find out what it will bring you, then decide.

Free service, but don't ask us to pay the postage to get it to you.

Sonora Shore

WHERE it is too hot to work, and the Indians live to a ripe old age.

Request:—"May I trouble you for some information concerning that part of the State of Sonora, Mexico, lying south of the Yuma desert and east of the Colorado River, a strip of about 200 miles there between the U. S. boundary and the gulf coast. I am trying to be as definite as I can in my inquiries. Here they are:

1. What sort of climate is there? Is it healthful? What is the rainfall?
2. Is there enough water for agricultural purposes?
3. What trees, plants, etc., grow there?
4. What animals?
5. Are there many inhabitants? Are they Indians? What do they "do for a living?"
6. Any minerals?"—Henry McCullough, Kansas City, Mo.

Reply, by Mr. Whiteaker:—The Sonora littoral, which is low and arid, is washed by the Gulf of California. This littoral, from the mouth of the Colorado River to the port of Agiabampo, is indented with salty lagoons and marshes swarming with crocodiles, alligators and allied reptilia.

The interior of the country is arid and of a desert-like nature. Very little rainfall for about nine months of the year. In July the rainy season usually begins and lasts until September. Light showers mostly every day. The desert-like country then becomes flower beds and the whole nature of the country changes. The vegetation of this section is mostly cacti, bear grass, mesquite, sage brush and the like. Where irrigation is resorted to the land is very productive. Very little farming is done here. It is too hot to work—the thermometer often registers from 100 to 119 degrees during the summer months.

Many of the Indians live to a ripe old age, so the climate must be healthful. The average rainfall is from 10 to 15 inches per year. One ought not to attempt farming with less than 25 inches. Where there is plenty of water it makes very little difference as to the rainfall, for irrigation will take care of the crops, but water is scarce out here. The streams flow some during the rainy season but soon dry up after this is over. In the mountains water holes and springs can be found if one knows where to look for them, but it is a chance in finding one without a knowledge of the country.

ONE can travel over this section for a day without seeing a live creature. In some of the mountain recesses, game can be found such as goats, deer, antelope, panthers, mountain lions, and a few smaller animals. Indians are about the only inhabitants of this section, or outlaws hiding from the authorities. This is a very thinly populated section. Near the Gulf the inhabitants fish for pearls and prospect for minerals and do some farming in the interior. Some of the clayey sections have pottery and grass weaving industries which bring in a small sum for the workers. These are sent to some of the towns where they are sold to tourists who happen to be on the look out for fancy Indian workmanship.

Copper, lead-silver, and a few other minerals are to be found in this section.

Old Songs That Men Have Sung

Devoted to outdoor songs, preferably hitherto unprinted—songs of the sea, the lumber-camps, Great Lakes, the West, old canal days, the negro, mountains, the pioneers, etc. Send in what you have or find, so that all may share in them.

Although conducted primarily for the collection and preservation of old songs, the editor will give information about modern ones when he can do so and *IF* all requests are accompanied with self-addressed envelop and reply postage (*NOT* attached). Write to Mr. Gordon direct, *NOT* to the magazine.

Conducted by R. W. GORDON, 4 Conant Hall, Cambridge, Mass.

SOMETIME in September, probably about one month after this issue reaches most of you, I shall leave Asheville, North Carolina on what I believe to be the most extensive trip yet planned for the collection and preservation of our American folk-song.

I shall spend at least six weeks in the mountain districts of North Carolina, Tennessee, Kentucky, and Virginia; pass through South Carolina, visiting Charleston and the Port Royal Islands; and go south along the coast to Savannah and Jacksonville. After that I shall go through the mountain district of Georgia, the interior of Alabama and of Mississippi, then visit the various cotton ports as far west as Galveston. In the spring I shall go north along the Mississippi, and so to Minnesota and the Dakotas; then east on the Canadian side of the Great Lakes into New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and finally Newfoundland.

THE success of the entire trip must depend in large part upon your cooperation. Obviously the time that I shall have to spend in any one district will be brief, too brief to enable me to hunt out singers. That I'm trusting you to do for me. You can direct me to districts where you know old songs are still to be found, can give me the names of friends and acquaintances who might be able to serve as local guides, and can send me brief notes of introduction to singers.

FOR my part, I shall make every attempt to insure the accurate recording and the permanent preservation of the materials collected. The tunes as well as the words will be taken down by means of phonographic recordings, and these records will be specially treated in order to make them more permanent.

Thus it will be possible for future generations to hear the living voices of singers of our day. There is no reason, as Mr. Edison himself assures me, why these records should not still be in perfect condition hundreds of years from now.

The idea of phonographic recordings is not new, but they have never been used—except for the songs of the American Indians—to any great extent in this country. Moreover such records as have up to this time been made by collectors have not been treated so as to preserve them for long periods of time. If then, through your cooperation, it is possible to make several thousand such recordings in the course of the next few years, something very real will have been done for the preservation of our national song.

I SHALL of course see personally many of you in the course of the trip, but in order that fairly definite plans may be made before the start, it is important that I should have before September tenth as much advance information as possible! Write me a brief note *now*, suggesting places that I should visit, people I should see, and giving such information as you can concerning to roads.

HERE is a contribution from Ontario, Canada. Mr. R. G. Shaw, who sent it in, says, "This is a true shanty song which I have heard sung many a time on the river and in the camps. It is not complete, but possibly some of your subscribers may have the rest of it. Ricks was one of the men sent out by the Georgian Bay Lumber Company to hire shantymen. Push—the foreman."

The Wahnapitae

Eighteen hundred and ninety-four,
Off to the woods we thought we'd go;
We hired with Ricks of the Georgian Bay
For to cut down pine on the Wahnapitae.
  Come arant come a roaring, fol a diddle day,
  Come arant come a roaring, drunk and away!

Seven miles to walk to the boat,
Then out lightly she did float;
We held her down and kept her straight,
And when we got there 'twas pretty damn late.
  Come arant come a roaring, fol a diddle day,
  Come arant come a roaring, drunk and away!

Then it was those logs to cut—
We cut them down and skidded them well;
Then it was those sleighs to load,
And we bogged them down with a damn big load.
  Come arant come a roaring, fol a diddle day,
  Come arant come a roaring, drunk and away!

O the first team in was a team of greys,
They were the boys to handle the sleighs!
The teamster yells as the horses snort
And he swears by—— 'tis a summer resort.
  Come arant come a roaring, fol a diddle day,
  Come arant come a roaring, drunk and away!

O the next team in was a grey and a black,
They were the boys that won't hold back!
The teamster's whip goes chicadee chack,
He sits there and says, "—— you, Jack,
  Come arant come a roaring, fol a diddle day,
  Come araht come aroaring, drunk and away!"

O the next team in was the Push's team,
You'd swear by —— they were run by steam!
They run four trips on a four-mile road
Forty-five logs to every load.
  Come arant come a roaring, fol a diddle day,
  Come arant come a roaring, drunk and away!

THE next is a song of English origin that should be familiar to many of you, though you will probably know it in a different version. I'd be glad to have copies from different parts of the country. The text here printed is from Mr. C. L.

Goodspeed of Chicago as he learned it from his father.

There were three jolly Welshmen,
Three jolly men were they,
They all went a-hunting
On St. David's Day.
Look a-there now!

They hunted in the hollow
And the first thing that they found
Was a snake in the grass,
And that they left behind.
Look a-there now!

One said it was a snake,
The other he said nay,
The other said 'twas his father's whip
With the cracker cracked away.
Look a-there now!

They hunted in the hollow
And the next thing that they found
Was a pig in the lane
And that they left behind.
Look a-there now!

One said it was a pig,
The other he said nay,
The other said 'twas a canary bird
With its feathers shot away.
Look a-there now!

They hunted in the hollow
And the next thing that they found
Was an owl in its ambush
And that they left behind.
Look a-there now!

One said it was an owl,
The other he said nay,
The other said 'twas the DEVIL
And all three ran away!
Look a-there now!

SEND all contributions to R. W. GORDON, 4 Conant Hall, Cambridge, Massachusetts. *Do not* send them to the magazine.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

SEPTEMBER 20th ISSUE

Besides the **three complete novelettes** mentioned on the second contents page of this issue, the next *Adventure* will bring you the following stories:

ON CULTIVATOR SHOAL *J. H. Greene*
The Irishman was a nuisance and a hero.

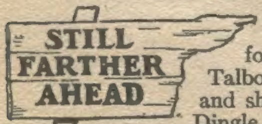
DAYS OF '49 A Six-Part Story Part V *Gordon Young*
Not all the miners liked *Hales*.

THE LAST LAUGHTER *Theodore Seixas Solomons*
One must plan a coup wisely.

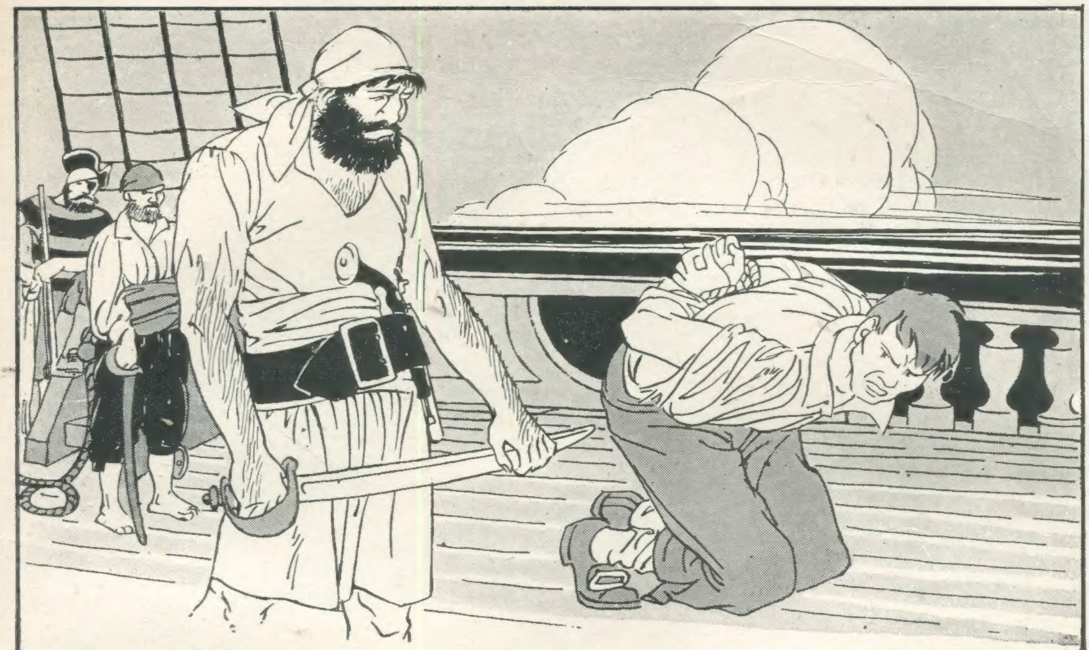
THE PSEUDO RANGER *Raymond S. Spears*
Tip couldn't face trouble.

CAMELOTE CAPTIVES *H. S. Cooper*
When the jungle floated.

HOW THE YOUNG ONES DIE *Claude Farrère*
No torture can daunt them.



THE THREE ISSUES following the next will contain *long* stories by H. B. Bedford-Jones, Thomson Burtis, William Byron Mowery, Charles Victor Fischer, Talbot Mundy, T. S. Stribling, Bill Adams, Bruce Johns, Harold Lamb and John Webb; and short stories by Leonard H. Nason, Barry Scobee, James Parker Long, Captain Dingle, Arthur O. Friel, Fairfax Downey, Alan LeMay, Claude Farrère, Frederick J. Jackson, Alex. McLaren, David Thibault and others; stories of aviators in the oilfields, mounted policemen in the Northwest, renegades in Mexico, doughboys on the Western Front, sailors off Cape Stiff, Yankee detectives in Central America, Cæsar's legions in the British Isles, pearl hunters in the South Seas, Don Cossacks on the Russian steppes, cowboys on the Western range and colonial conspirators in old France.



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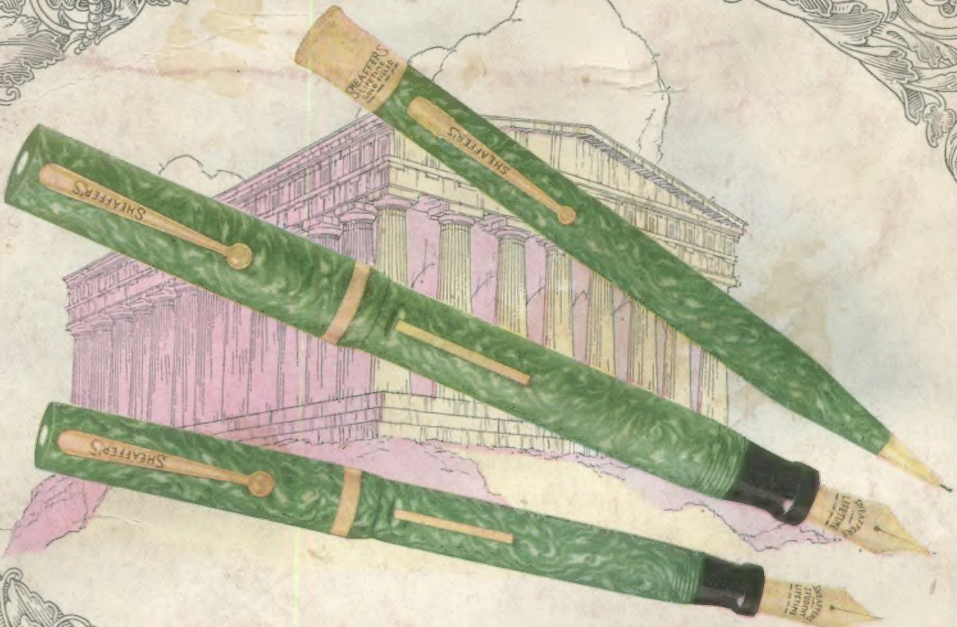

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